



SARA CORNING CENTRE FOR GENOCIDE EDUCATION

45 Hallcrown Place, Toronto, ON M2J 4Y4 | 647-206-4769 | www.corningcentre.org | info@corningcentre.org

Armin T. Wegner: Twice an Upstander



'I have taken numerous photographs during the past few days. I was told that Jemal Pasha, the hangman of Syria, imposed the death penalty on anyone violating the prohibition on photography inside the [Armenian] refugee camps. I carried these images of horror and accusation rolled into a bundle against my stomach ... I have no doubt that I am committing high treason, but I am conscious that perhaps I have been able to assist these poor people even a little' Armin Wegner, Aleppo, 19 October 1916



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Title of the Lesson

Armin T. Wegner – Human Rights Activist during WWI and WWII

Background Information

A German soldier and medic, Armin T. Wegner was a witness to genocide both during WWI and WWII. As a result, Wegner voiced his concerns and was known to many as a heroic human rights activist. This lesson will include the study of Wegner's role during this violent time in history and will allow students to analyze the significance of advocating for social justice concerns as global citizens.

Learning Expectations

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- define and understand what it means to be a global citizen
- understand and identify social justice issues on local and global levels
- define and understand advocacy
- create their own strategies of advocacy for a greater cause
- draft a letter focused on advocating for social justice issues

Materials and Resources

Background Information and Resources for Teachers

Armin Wegner's Voice

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21Yysv63GBM>

Biography

- <http://theworldismycountry.info/posters/poster-6-armin-t-wegner-1915-1916>
- <http://www.armin-t-wegner.us/ATW/Biography.html>
- <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/stories/wegner.asp>

Armin Wegner's Letters

- "This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in Journal of Genocide Research on 03/08/2010, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/146235200112463>."
- "This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in Journal of Genocide Research on 03/08/2010, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/146235200112481>."

On social justice and being an upstander

- <http://www.socialjustice.org/index.php?page=key-issues>
- <http://bullyingepidemic.com/upstanders/>



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Assessment Strategies

Observation
Oral Question and Answer
Response Journal
Work Samples

Delivery of the Lesson

- 1) **Hook:** On individual, small pieces of paper, write down names of famous upstanders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, and social justice issues such as gender inequality, racial inequality, Aboriginal rights, etc. (see link in resources). Each student chooses one piece of paper out of a box/bag. Once complete, students participate in a think/pair/share and attempt to identify the theme of the lesson by discussing the names of upstanders or the social issues they have selected.
- 2) Once identified, a class discussion around social justice concerns will take place. During this time, students will learn the meaning of advocacy, different forms of advocacy, and what it means to be an upstander in Canada and on a global level.

Create a discussion by using the following questions which are addressed by journalist **Cheryl Jackson in her blog posting "Rise of the Upstander"** - <http://bullyingepidemic.com/upstanders/>

- a. **How does being an upstander differ from being a bystander?**
 - b. **How does being an upstander differ from being a hero?**
 - c. **Why is creating a culture of upstanders important?**
 - d. **Can we learn to be upstanders?**
- 3) Introduction to Wegner: Teachers will introduce Armin T. Wegner and provide background information and his biography to their students.
 - 4) Wegner as a human rights activist and an upstander: As a class, read and discuss Wegner's advocacy letters written during WWI. Prompt students to analyze the significance: what is his goal? How is he attempting to achieve this goal? Break into groups and allow students time to respond to the following discussion questions.
 - a) After reading both letters, what contributions did the minority Jewish population and Armenian subjects make to their respective countries outlined by Wegners letters? Are there any similarities or differences between the two? Look at their political, social, economic, and military influence



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- b) In Wegners words, do you think the persecution of both minorities were similar or different? Was their fate similar? How so?
 - c) Does Wegner believe both groups are victims of genocide/racism or casualties of war? How does he describe the position of these religious minorities?
 - d) What characteristics can you identify from the letters that make Armin Wegner an upstander? What requests would you make if you were writing to those he wrote to? Would you make any changes to his letter?
- 5) Segway into the culminating letter assignment: have students highlight key terms that are beneficial to the message in Wegner's message. Have students analyze the structure of the letter.
- 6) Following the reading analysis, students will complete the comprehension questions related to the letters. This assessment will ensure their understanding of the lesson and topic.
- 7) Culminating Task: Advocacy Letter Assignment
- Using Wegner's letters as guides, students will draft their own advocacy letters focused on social justice concerns of their choice (list of topics provided by the teacher).
 - Once assessed and graded, students will correct their letter based on teacher recommendations and will mail it out to their local MP, Councilor, Trustee, Mayor, etc.
 - Evaluation strategies: format and structure of the letter, high-frequency vocabulary used in relation to the topic at hand, has the student communicated their concern in a thorough, clear manner? etc.
 - A few topics to consider: local environment, access to education, gender discrimination, racial discrimination, discrimination against the elderly, Aboriginal rights, welfare, peace and justice, economic inequality, etc. (see <http://www.socialjustice.org/index.php?page=key-issues>)
 - Option: teachers may choose to open up the topics to student concerns within the school community; for example, increasing cost of cafeteria food, cell phones in the classroom for educational purposes, etc.

This lesson was developed by Maral Deveci, OCT and John Adourian, OCT.



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Excerpt from “Rise of the Upstander” by Cheryl Jackson
<http://bullyingepidemic.com/upstanders/>

How does being an upstander differ from being a bystander? A bystander is unable or unwilling to act. They often feel guilty for this. An upstander takes action and feels empowered.

How does being an upstander differ from being a hero? We tend to think of heroes as people who act in big ways, who stand out, who are perhaps physically superior (superheroes) or larger than life. They might seem to have unique qualities that the rest of us could never have. This isn't true. We can teach our kids that all of us have the ability to be heroes by acting in defense of those who are mistreated – by being an upstander.

Why is creating a culture of upstanders important? It's very difficult to stand up to a bully alone, much easier and more effective if done as a group. One of the reasons bystanders don't act is because they don't want to rock the boat or go against the norm. We all care about what our group thinks of us, so we tend to follow along. When we're part of a crowd we also think someone else will step in to solve a problem. In a culture of upstanders, everyone in the group will recognize the injustice and will step up, as a group. An upstander in a group of upstanders feels safe and won't have to act alone.

Can we learn to be upstanders? Yes, we can. The first step to becoming an upstander is to learn about situations that might require our action. Researchers talk about fostering a “heroic imagination.” We can prepare ourselves by visualizing situations that would require our action and then imagining what actions we might take.