

Exploring Humanitarian Law

WHAT IS EHL?

Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) is an international educational program for young people. The aim of the program is to expose learners (ages 13-18) to issues of humanitarian law and principles of respect for life and human dignity. EHL provides educators with learning materials and strategies that may reinforce and enrich existing educational programs. The materials are built on historical and contemporary situations. EHL meets national education standards for social studies. Worldwide implementation began in 2002 with nearly 70 countries currently involved. The American Red Cross is leading implementation efforts in the United States.

WHY EXPLORE HUMANITARIAN LAW WITH YOUTH?

Humanitarian law is a body of international law that aims to protect the life and human dignity of all during armed conflict and to reduce and prevent the suffering and destruction that results from war. Nations party to the Geneva Conventions have a legal obligation to encourage the study of humanitarian law as widely as possible. As one of the most widely ratified instruments of international law, these Conventions, together with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, can be viewed as an integral part of today's basic education. Education in issues of humanitarian law strengthens and enriches the knowledge, skills and attitudes that constitute the indispensable learning content of the common international core of basic education.

LEARNING GOALS

The EHL program contributes to the formation of responsible young people and specifically focuses on positive changes in:

- awareness of humanitarian norms, limits and protections applicable to situations of armed conflict
- understanding of the multiple perspectives of those involved in situations of armed conflict and the potential complexity in the application of humanitarian law
- interest in humanitarian issues at the local, national and international level
- the capacity to view conflict situations at home and abroad for a humanitarian perspective that places respect for, and protection of, life and human dignity at the center of the analysis
- active involvement in community service to protect and promote humanitarian attitudes.

The course employs a variety of tools and strategies to help students view war through the eyes of victims, witnesses, and combatants. Photographs, video clips, and first-person accounts show students both the horrors of war and the possibilities for relieving suffering. Through brainstorming, large- and small-group discussions, reflective writing, class debates, and role plays, students explore the plight of war refugees, landmine victims, and soldiers and officers caught in often agonizing dilemmas.

Like international humanitarian law itself, EHL doesn't rely on particular theologies or ideologies, but is based on behaving decently and with kindness toward the helpless. The curriculum is designed to work with the head and the heart. Students come away from the course having exercised both. They grapple with the same issues and questions that perplex world leaders, and learn how to listen respectfully and take another's point of view; they are better able to see the humanity in others, even in their enemies.

COMPONENTS AND RESOURCE MATERIALS

The course content consists of five core modules. Each module is designed to take 3-4 academic hours to complete. The resource materials include: teacher and student materials, student video, methodology guide, teacher training video, implementation guide and glossary. Supplemental guidelines for evaluation and integration and an online community of practice are also available to support educators.

WHERE CAN I GET ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON EHL?

American Red Cross, NHQ, International Services Department, Attn: Alicia Guajardo
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General inquiries may also be sent to: EHL@usa.redcross.org.

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