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A MOMENT IN YOUR SHOES

Grades: 6 and up

Time: 45 minutes to several days

Materials: Facts and statistics (and possibly stories and film clips) about child labor and animal agriculture (check our Resources section); 1-2 large posters or several enlarged photographs of examples of children in forced labor/slave labor situations (ideally in a rug factory) and animals in a factory farm (specifically hens in modern battery cages); two milk crates (you can find these at thrift stores or ask for leftover crates from a grocery store) or one bread crate; a large mat or poster board, at least 11" x 14" (scraps are available free from most frame shops) with two rows of thread attached at the top for tying knots (see below); and a Circle of Moral Concern (see below)

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies, Science, Consumer Science, and Language Arts

This lively, interactive and thought-provoking activity can be used to introduce human and animal issues and the connections between them (e.g., human slavery and the use of animals for entertainment; sweatshops and factory farms; human and animal experimentation, etc.). The exploration of human issues and animal issues can also be separated, and the two activities below can be done independently.

1. Ask for two volunteers willing to take off their shoes. Place the crate(s) upside down on the floor next to each other, and ask the two volunteers to stand quietly on it/them and do nothing. Let the volunteers know that they should not move their arms away from the sides of their body.
2. Ask for two volunteers willing to tie knots on a board. Ask that the volunteers not speak, and have them tie knots until you tell them that they can stop. Explain that their knots should be even and perfect and that they should work as fast as they can.

Pertinent Information: The two volunteers share the mat/poster board, which should have the long side facing "top" and have one set of knots for each volunteer to tie. The thread is connected to the mat board by stringing the thread through two holes punched in the mat board and then tied in a knot to hold it.

Let the volunteers know that you'd really like them to remain where they are until you "release" them, but if what they're doing becomes too painful or uncomfortable, they should just get off/stop. Tell them you'll get back to them shortly, and then proceed with

your program.

3. Mention that much of our society now recognizes the basic rights of people from all walks of life -- that no matter what color, religion, class, gender, etc. a person is, we accept that people should not be harmed or treated in a manner that violates their rights. Remind them that it hasn't always been this way and that, in many places and among some people, it still isn't. (You may wish to ask students for examples, or give some of your own.)

4. Show students the Circle of Moral Concern, using examples relevant to your students. (See sample below. Note: You can create as many circles as you wish. Some possibilities might include: "African slave trade ends." "Women gain the right to vote." "Children are protected from abuse by the law." "Environmental laws are established." and "Animal protection laws are established.")

Mention that our society's circle of moral concern started small and grew larger after a series of social justice movements helped to extend rights to people of color, women, children, other species, and the environment.

5. Lead students in a discussion, using questions, facts and statistics relevant to them. Examples of questions related to both humans and nonhuman animals might include:

- Should the circle widen further to include all people? Ask for instances in which humans may not be afforded equal treatment and/or equal rights.
- Should the circle widen further to include nonhuman animals? It already includes some animals in certain situations (endangered species, companion dogs and cats to some degree, etc.). What about other animals?
- Should it be legal to for a child under the age of 10 to work long hours on a regular or full-time basis? (You may want to share a few facts about child labor around the world.)
- Should it be legal to take a hot iron and press it into the flesh of their dog or cut off a big section of their pet bird's beak without painkillers? (Yet we can brand cows and debeak chickens.) How about to put their pet bird in a cage so small that she can't stretch her wings? (Most chickens live that way.) You can make a variety of comparisons between what we aren't allowed to do to some animals, but are allowed to do to others.

6. Discuss whether these inconsistencies in how we treat others reflect prejudice, economic and social conditions, cultural norms, etc., asking, "Why do these inconsistencies exist?"

7. Periodically check in with your volunteers and find out how they are doing. The volunteers on the crate will likely tell you their feet hurt. The volunteers tying the knots will likely tell you that they are bored and frustrated. When you feel they have had

enough (or when they ask to get off the crates or to stop tying), ask them the following questions before they leave their “posts”:

Ask the crate volunteers: “How would you like to live like this for a year?” Assure them that you will provide food through tubes and trays, and if they have to go to the bathroom, they can just go. The waste will fall through the openings in the crates.

When they say they would not want to spend a year, ask about a month, a week, a day, even an hour. Put your arms on either side of them and remind them that they can't ever stretch their arms. Ask how they'd feel about each other if they had to live this way for a month or a year. When you are ready to “release” them, ask your audience to give the volunteers a round of applause.

Ask the knot volunteers: “Instead of going to school and living with your family, how would you like to do this all day, every day, for years?” Tell them that you'll feed them, and that they can sleep on the floor. When they say they would not want to spend a year, ask about a month, a week, a day, even an hour. Ask how they'd feel about never going to school, seeing their family, or playing again. When you are ready to “release” them, ask your audience to give the volunteers a round of applause.

Let the audience (and your volunteers) guess whom they were representing. (The crate volunteers represent egg-laying hens in modern factory farms and the knot volunteers represent children in carpet factories; however, most answers you may get will be correct. For example, audience members might say that the people on the crates were cows or rabbits, or some other animals, and that the people tying knots worked in a sweatshop.)

8. Share relevant facts/statistics and enlarged photos/posters with your students about child laborers and animals in factory farms [you may want to show photos of children specifically in rug factories (see photos in the book *Free the Children* by Craig Kielburger) as well as chickens in battery cages (see resources such as the Farm Sanctuary website)]. As you share the pictures and information, ask your students to consider questions such as:

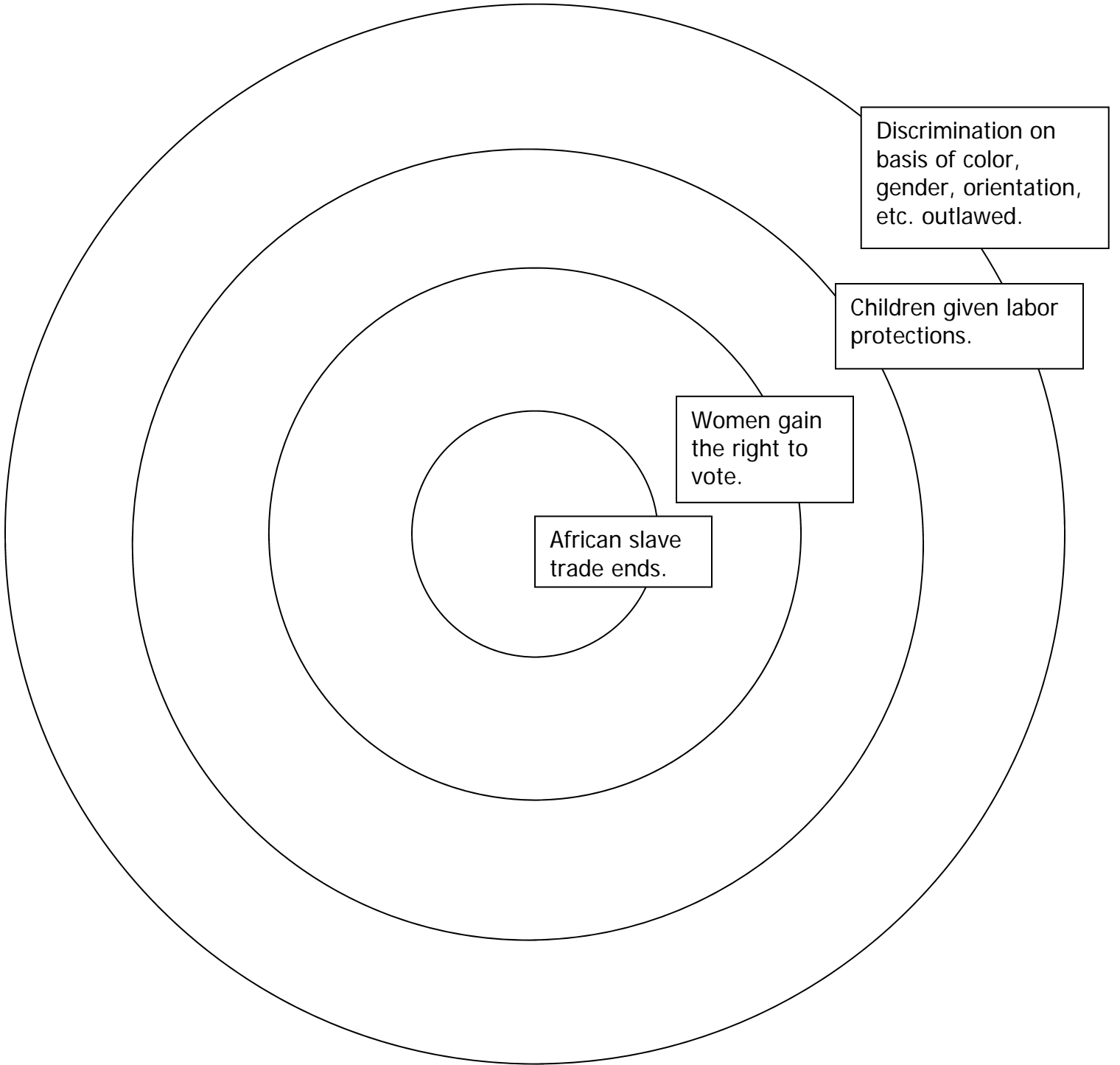
- How is my life different from the lives of those children? How would I feel if that were me? Why are these children working, instead of in school?
- Would I want my cat/dog treated like animals in factory farms are? Why are farmed animals treated that way? How would I feel if that were me?
- Do these children look happy & healthy? Do these animals look happy & healthy?

10. Share stories and video footage about child laborers and farmed animals, as well as stories about children and animals rescued and protected from abusive situations. (See our Resources section.) Be sure to end the lesson on a positive, inspiring note.

11. Discuss ways in which young people can bring about change in both of these areas. Sample questions might include:

- What changes can I make in my own life?
- What changes can we help bring about in our community?
- How can we help strengthen laws to help children and animals?

Sample Circle of Moral Concern



Activity by the Institute for Humane Education faculty