





Holocaust Memorial Day 2010

Teaching Resource on Janusz Korczak

Children taking part in democratic decision making in an Orphanage in 1925, including running a children's court.



Children at a democratic meeting in the Nasz Dom Orphanage. Behind them in the corner Maryna Falska who with Janusz founded the Orphanage. Nasz Dom, Pruszkow, Cedrowa (street) ca. 1925. The home was planned and built between 1927-1928 by architect Z. Tarasin.

Janusz Korczak:

Hero of the Children



Set-up the world's first national newspaper for children by children.

Ran orphanages that were democratic, based on children making decisions.



Ran a democratic orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto. Wrote, broadcast & campaigned for children's rights. Died, with his children, in Treblinka Concentration Camp. UN Charter of Children's Human Rights based on his work. Year of the Child, 1979, named after him.









Janusz Korczak and his Democratic Orphanages.

Holocaust Memorial Day 2010

This year, 2009, was the thirtieth anniversary of the Year of the Child, dedicated to Janusz Korczak, and the twentieth anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

You can explore children's rights, justice and the student voice by exploring the life and work of Janusz Korczak.

He was a polish, Jewish medical doctor who gave up his practice to run orphanages and promote the rights of children. He set-up the first national children's newspaper, run by and for children. He broadcast on Polish radio, wrote articles and books. His most famous book, in English, is King Matt, the story of an orphan becoming king and running his country...

On 5th of August 1942 Korczak and his children from the orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto travelled by railroad to the Treblinka extermination camp. Of the 17 thousand rocks that are a monument to the victims at Treblinka concentration camp there is only one with a name on it, 'Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszmit) and the Children'.

Korczak was an advocate for children's rights, wrote passionately about children's welfare and applied his progressive educational ideas in the orphanages which he directed.

His ideas preceded the children's rights documents later developed by the Geneva Convention and the United Nations General Assembly.

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Activities:

1. Read the document, 'Korczak's Writings on Children's Rights'. Make a chart comparing Korczak's ideas with the UN document. You could also look at the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, celebrating its twentieth anniversary. Taken from JANUSZ KORCZAK AND THE CHILDREN OF THE

WARSAW GHETTO, teachers guide, Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, Frieda Miller.

- 2. Read the life of Korczak and create a display for your school, or a PowerPoint for a school/class assembly. Pictures can be used from the website: http://fcit.usf.edu/Holocaust/KORCZAK/photos/
- 3. There is a jigsaw activity for the class. 5 groups each have an information sheet about the children's courts in Korczak's orphanages, with four questions. They can present their findings to the class, or the groups can be split up and reformed so that there is one person from each group together to share what they have found. The groups can discuss the questions:
- a. how did the courts work?
- b. were the courts a good idea?
- c. what did the children learn from them?
- d. how could the class run a similar court?

(The Jewish Museum has an exhibition and workshop based on Janusz Korczak and the children's courts; this will be available in Tower Hamlets during the late Spring, early Summer terms).

4. Summerhill is a school featured on CBBC (it won the best television children's drama script award at the BAFTAs), that holds school meetings as part of its justice system, to create laws and solve problems between community members, children and adults. This was founded in 1921 by a teacher and writer, A.S.Neill.

You can see how it holds its meetings on its website www.summerhillschool.co.uk. The CBBC drama is an excellent resource. It is also featured on the Channel 4 school's website, and programme Citizen Power: Your Voice Counts. The programme looks at democracy in the United Kingdom and its absence in other parts of the world. We visit Summerhill, a democratically run school where pupils and teachers have an equal say... http://www.channel4learning.com/sites/citizenpower and click on Your Voice Counts and then Fly on the Wall. You can invite ex-teachers or children to be interviewed or to run a workshop at your school...

What would a school based on children's rights look like?

5. You could get your school council, and then the whole school, to explore its values and how it works and then to write a constitution. There are online support material at www.citizenship-pieces.org.uk . If you are a Tower Hamlets school you can have your constitution celebrated and shared by the Town Hall...

This material has been put together by Humanities Education Centre to promote Holocaust Memorial Day, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Tower Hamlets Fair Play Wall.



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Janusz Korczak

(pronounce using a soft 'ge' sound, e.g. Korge-ack)

Janusz Korczak was an inspirational teacher and writer who cared passionately about the rights and welfare of children. His books were well known long before the outbreak of the Second World War. He had served in the Polish army, and was also a medical doctor; he had chosen to work in a hospital for the poor, so his earnings had been low.

Korczak was an outstanding educator who, as early as 1912, spoke and wrote extensively about the right of each child, regardless of background or social standing, to be a happy and constructive citizen. He was committed to social justice and believed that education had a vital role to play in



this, and gained an international reputation for what were then groundbreaking ideas.

In putting these ideas into practice, Korczak founded two large orphanages in the city of Warsaw, in Poland. One was in the Jewish part of the city. Korczak, who was himself Jewish, was Head of both. The orphanages was described as a children's democracy; the children themselves decided who could stay and who could not, and had their own parliament, court and newspaper, in keeping with Korczak's philosophy.

With Hitler's rise to power came his invasion policies, and the Nazis moved throughout Eastern Europe. In line with their racist ideology, they evicted Jewish families from their homes and sent them to live in designated areas. These areas, the **ghettos**, were essentially large prison camps, controlled and well guarded. The children at one of Korczak's orphanages were therefore among the hundreds of Jews enclosed within the Warsaw ghetto. Korczak had the option of staying with the children in his other Warsaw orphanage, since the ghetto wall now separated the two. However, he chose to go with the children in the ghetto because he felt that their needs were greater, taking on the task of looking after 200 Jewish children there, aged between seven and fourteen.

Conditions in the ghettos were appalling, where families were crowded together without adequate supplies of food or water. Many people died from starvation, disease and casual executions carried out by the Nazis. Eventually, the ghettos were 'cleared' and destroyed as part of the Nazi systematic attempt to rid Europe of all Jews. Those who had not already died were taken away to the extermination camps. Korczak could do nothing to save the children from his orphanage, since all Jews were marked for deportation. Eventually their turn would come and they, too, would be loaded onto a train and taken away.

Escape from the ghetto was virtually impossible, especially for so many children. If they could get outside the walls, the local population would have been able to tell where they were from and someone would have denounced them; the penalties for not informing on Jews were severe. They needed safe houses, false papers and a great deal of outside help, which was unlikely to be given.

However, Korczak could have saved himself. Friends outside the ghetto, especially those who had been in his orphanage before the war had prepared for Korczak a secret room and false papers. An old Polish pupil, Igor Neverly, disguised himself as a sewer inspector and visited Korczak at the orphanage inside the ghetto. He begged his old teacher to escape with him into the outside world and live in hiding until the war was over, as he had so much to give in the post-war world.

And yet, Janusz Korczak chose to remain with 'his' children. Hiding his own fear and helplessness, when the time came, he led the children in five orderly lines, quietly through the streets of the ghetto, to the waiting railway wagons, comforting the youngest and instilling courage in all. They were despatched in cattle trucks to Treblinka, a 'death camp' where arrivals were immediately sent straight to the gas chambers.

Although Korczak was not able to save his children from the Nazis, he did make a great deal of difference to those he comforted to the end, and to those who saw his example when the children were marched through Warsaw by the Nazis and onto the trains. While he lived and died at a time and in a place where the abuse of all human rights was on a colossal scale, Korczak's greatest legacy is perhaps the inspiration he provided for the promotion of children's rights worldwide, through not only his books, speeches and writings, but also by his personal example.

Most of his ideas were included in the UNESCO charter for children's rights after the war.

www.hmd.org.uk

http://www.hmd.org.uk/files/1150812993-46.pdf

Korczak on CHILDREN'S Rights

The child has the right to love.

"Love the child, not just your own."

The child has the right to respect.

"Let us demand respect for shining eyes, smooth foreheads, youthful effort and confidence, Why should dulled eyes, a wrinkled brow, untidy grey hair, or tired resignation command greater respect?"

The child has the right to optimal conditions in which to grow and develop.

"We demand: do away with hunger, cold, dampness, stench, overcrowding, overpopulation."

The child has the right to live in the present.

"Children are not people of tomorrow; they are people today."

The child has the right to be him or herself.

"A child is not a lottery ticket, marked to win the main prize."

The child has the right to make mistakes.

"There are no more fools among children than among adults."

The child has the right to fail.

"We renounce the deceptive longing for perfect children."

The child has the right to be taken seriously.

"Who asks the child for his opinion and consent?"

The child has the right to be appreciated for what he is.

"The child, being small, has little market value."

The child has the right to desire, to claim, to ask.

"As the years pass, the gap between adult demands and children's desires becomes progressively wider."

The child has the right to have secrets. "Respect their secrets."

The child has the right to "a lie, a deception, a theft".

"He does not have the right to lie, deceive, steal."

The child has the right to respect for his possessions and budget.

"Everyone has the right to his property, no matter how insignificant or valueless."

The child has the right to resist educational influence that conflicts with his or her own beliefs.

"It is fortunate for mankind that we are unable to force children to yield to assaults upon their common sense and humanity."

The child has the right to a Children's Court where he can judge and be judged by his peers.

"We are the sole judges of the child's actions, movements, thoughts, and plans . . . I know that a Children's Court is essential, that in fifty years there will not be a single school, not a single institution without one."

The child has the right to be defended in the juvenile-justice court system.

"The delinquent child is still a child...Unfortunately, suffering bred of poverty spreads like lice: sadism, crime, uncouthness, and brutality are nurtured on it."

The child has the right to respect for his grief.

"Even though it be for the loss of a pebble."

This list was compiled by Betty Jean Lifton from Korczak's writings *How to Love a Child, The Child's Right to Respect* and other works.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html) is a statement that recognizes the inherent dignity and the equal rights of all people. The United Nations adopted the declaration in 1948, after World War II in response to the abuse of human rights perpetrated during the Holocaust. The declaration later became the basis for the 1959 Children's Human Rights Declaration and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (http://www.unicef.org/crc).

CHILDREN'S HUMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION

Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1959.

The Principles

- 1. All children have the right to what follows, no matter what their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, or where they were born or to whom they were born.
- 2. Children have the special right to grow up in a healthy and normal way, free and with dignity.
- 3. Children have the right to a name and to be a member of a country.
- 4. Children have the right to good food, housing and medical care.
- 5. Children have the right to special care if handicapped in any way.
- 6. Children have the right to love and understanding, preferably from parents, but from the government where you have no parent.
- 7. Children have the right to go to school for free, to play, and to have an equal chance to be what they are and to learn to be responsible and useful.
- 8. Children have the right always to be among the first to get help.
- 9. Children have the right not to be harmed and not to be hired for work until old enough.



Janusz Korczak and his Democratic Orphanages

Part 1

"One court case tells me more about a

child than a month of observing him," Korczak would say. He considered the court of peers the cornerstone of his system. While he was away during the war, he had drawn up a Code of Laws that would give the judges guidelines in rendering their verdicts. It was not unlike the Napoleonic Code on which the Polish legal system was based-with the difference that Korczak's Code stressed forgiveness.

The Preamble to the Code states Korczak's philosophy of law. "If anyone has done something bad, it is best to forgive. If it was done because he did not know, he knows now. If he did it intentionally, he will be more careful in the future . . . But the court must defend the timid against the bullies, the conscientious against the careless and idle."

Korczak was still hoping to impart the idea of justice, however imperfect, to his young orphans. He wanted them to understand that there are just laws and unjust laws, even as there are just people and unjust people. "The court is not justice, but it should strive for justice," the Preamble continues. "The court is not truth, but its goal is truth." Because justice is dependent on human beings, the most central of whom is the judge, it warns: "Judges may make mistakes. They may punish for acts they themselves are guilty of But it is shameful if a judge consciously hands down an unjust verdict."

The children's court met on Saturday mornings with five judges, chosen each week from among those children who had no court cases pending against them.

Questions:

- 1. What was the main value for Korczak's Code?
- 2. What did he want the children to learn?
- 3. When did the court meet?
- 4. Who made the decisions in the court?



Janusz Korczak and his Democratic Orphanages

Part 2

There were a thousand 'articles' or judgements the judges could give out, starting from Articles 1 to 99, "You acted

wrongly, but you did not realize it," or "It was the first time and you have promised not to do it again" to Article 100 "Without granting pardon, the court states that you committed the act with which you are charged.", the only punishment being the court's disapproval. Then they jumped in units of one hundred to 1,000. Under articles 200 to 800, the guilty child's name was published in the orphanage newspaper or posted on the bulletin board, or he was deprived of privileges for one week and his family was summoned. Article 900 carried the dire warning that the court had "abandoned hope": the accused had to find a supporter among the children willing to vouch for him. Article 1000, a dreaded verdict, meant expulsion. The guilty party had the right to apply for readmission after three months, but with little hope, for his place would have been taken by another child the day he left.

It took a while before the corridors began ringing with "I'll sue you!" A child who felt wronged listed his case on the bulletin board in the dining hall. Stefa, Korczak's co-worker, acting as the Court Clerk, entered it in the court ledger. But in the period before the trial the plaintiff's anger often subsided, and by the time Stefa read the charges in court the child was ready to drop charges. During the first weeks Korczak noted that almost all the plaintiffs forgave the defendants at the hearings, and the judges cited Article I: "Charge is withdrawn."

Questions

- 1. How many articles were there?
- 2. What does the word 'article' mean?
- 3. Up to Article 100 what was the court's punishment?
- 4. If you wanted to bring someone to court what would you do?



Janusz Korczak and his Democratic Orphanage

Part 3

As many as a hundred and fifty cases might be heard by the judges during a Saturday-morning court session, with most

defendants receiving an article under 100. Hearings were held in the Quiet Room (where children could go during the week to be alone), and the length of the deliberations varied according to the difficulty of the case. Charges were brought for name-calling, pushing, teasing, snatching someone else's possessions, banging doors, leaving the yard without permission, climbing a tree, breaking an inkpot, using abusive language, making faces during prayers, not returning checker and lotto games to their places. The judges might ask the plaintiff "How many times have you done this?" or "What article did you get in your last court case?" before making their verdict.

Misdemeanours that were punished by an article over 100 were: locking someone out in the courtyard for fun, disturbing others at work, misbehaving during study hour, not washing one's hands, cheating at games. In situations where the culprit was unidentified, the case was heard anyway; if the crime disgraced the republic, a black mourning patch was placed on the bulletin board.

The court was a "psychological drama based on knowledge of child psychology," according to one educator, but Korczak's critics outside the orphanage insisted that the court would accustom the children to being litigious. Korczak responded that, on the contrary, it would teach them respect for the law and individual rights, and make them appreciate how "inconvenient, detrimental, and senseless" lawsuits are.

Questions:

- 1. How many cases could there be in a week?
- 2. What were children accused of by other children?
- 3. What questions might the child judges ask?
- 4. How did Korczak defend the court system from adults who said that it would only teach children to automatically use the law?



Janusz Korczak and his Democratic Orphanages

Part 4

Still, he wasn't prepared for how quickly the worst troublemakers in the orphanage would find the court a nuisance and try to sabotage it.

They'd boast: "I'm not going to let some young punk be my judge!" and "To hell with the court, I'd rather have my ears pulled or my hands slapped!" The ringleaders who constantly attacked the court were sly enough to realize that they could wriggle out of things more easily without it. They started a campaign demanding that guilty defendants be hung on the spot and threw mock tantrums when the court refused to impose the death penalty.

Their behaviour had the desired effect. The other children stopped suing each other rather than endure the constant bickering over the court, and the judges began conspiring to acquit the defendants or to deal leniently with them, no matter what their crime. Finally, when one judge hit another who wanted to conduct the trial according to his own conscience, Korczak was forced to acknowledge that the court, which was intended to "replace irrational arguments with calm thinking," was causing more disorder than order. He even began to suspect that it was harmful to the orphanage.

The answers to questionnaires he passed out among the children proved him right: "The court is necessary, but it achieves nothing."

"It is good for some kids, but not for others."

"Our court may be useful in the future, but not now"

"Only if the court were different would it be helpful."

Korczak still believed the court was essential (and that in fifty years all schools would have one), but he had to concede that his orphans weren't ready for it yet. "It is clear that they would rather be slaves than free," he wrote bitterly in his journal when he suspended the court indefinitely.

Questions:

- 1. What did children do to stop the court cases?
- 2. How did the other children act?
- 3. What did the children think about the court?
- 4. How did Korczak respond?



Janusz Korczak and his Democratic Orphanages

Part 5

The court reopened four weeks after its suspension, but only when three demands of the children had been met: that they

could appeal a decision after three months; that a Judicial Board made up of two judges and one adult, elected by secret ballot for a term of three months, would handle the most difficult cases; and that the children had the right to sue the adult staff. This last stipulation set Korczak's critics on him again: how could he allow a child to take an adult to court?

Korczak made a point of bringing himself to court five times over one six-month period. He confessed to boxing a boy's ears, throwing a boy out of the dormitory, putting a child in the corner, insulting a judge, and accusing a girl of stealing. He submitted a written defence for each incident. The judges gave him Article 21 in the first three cases: "The court finds that you were entitled to act as you did." In the fourth, he got Article 71: "The court pardons you since you regret your actions" And in the last, Article 7. "The court accepts your admission of guilt."

Questions:

- 1. How long did it take to restart the court?
- 2. What differences were there?
- 3. Why might these differences make the courts work better?
- 4. What did Korczak do in terms of children taking adults to court?