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MODERN-DAY SLAVERY:

Equipping the Next Generation for Social Change

Margaret Tienhaara, *College of Liberal Arts*

STUDENT AUTHOR BIO SKETCH

Margaret Tienhaara is a freshman at Purdue University in the College of Liberal Arts majoring in global studies and political science. Her dream is to promote education for impoverished children in underdeveloped nations. In this article, she describes her process of organizing a presentation about modern-day slavery for 100 eighth grade students from Tecumseh Junior High School. The goal was to challenge the students to consider a major such as Purdue's Global Studies and learn about creating social change.

INTRODUCTION

"I am a worthless ignorant blacky!" was the phrase I screamed on a cold October night during a slavery reenactment my senior year in high school. My friend and I had been whispering to each other when our "Master" caught us in the act. I had to put my face on the ground and my hands behind my back while I repeated this phrase into the damp earth. I was ashamed and embarrassed! However, I knew that what I was feeling was only a glimpse into the life of a real slave. This experience impacted me to such a degree that I began to study the history of slaves, and during my search I discovered an even greater horror—that slavery still exists today. Currently, the United Nations estimates that there are 21 million forced labor victims (UN News, 2014). Many of these victims are children who work for cruel people under harsh conditions. My passion to make a difference is the reason I am pursuing a degree in global studies and political science. Through my studies and projects, I am equipping myself with tools to combat these injustices.

DESCRIPTION

Education is an important step in the fight against the injustice of modern-day slavery, which destroys lives

and creates inconceivable issues for generations. When I was offered the opportunity to talk about the history and effects of slavery to over one hundred eighth grade students from Tecumseh Junior High, I was thrilled. On the school's website, I discovered that 32% of the student population was part of a minority group (Tecumseh Junior High School, n.d.). As history has shown us, minority groups are the most vulnerable to oppression. When I asked the students about their own heritage, one of them stated that his relatives were brought to America as slaves. Many others had similar stories. Since such a large part of my audience was from a minority background, I knew this subject would be pertinent to their lives. My challenge was to find a way to bridge the past with the present and show them how they can take part in fighting modern-day slavery.

During our morning together, my goal was to get the students involved and to have an interactive experience with them. I did this by incorporating games, discussions, and storytelling. The first game we did as an icebreaker was "find the country." I would throw an inflatable globe to one of the students and ask them to

Figure 1 (banner image, above). One of the groups of Tecumseh students who attended the lecture.

Figure 2. Discussing slavery on the Island of Hispaniola.

either show us their favorite country and explain why it's their favorite, or show us the country of their heritage and tell us about it. While some of the students had never traveled outside of Indiana, they had dreams of doing so. This moved us into discussing how slavery is interwoven into their everyday lives.

I passed out pieces of chocolate to the students and asked if they could tell me where the chocolate was from. Many of the students answered either the U.S. or Europe. While they were correct that it was made in those countries, they did not know that the majority of cocoa, the key ingredient in chocolate, comes from the west coast of Africa. This sparked a discussion about modern-day child slavery and its role in the production of chocolate here in the U.S. and around the world. We talked about causes and solutions to modern-day slavery and how they can combat it. We concluded our time together with lunch and a tour of Purdue's campus.

After the presentation, I spoke with the students about what they wanted to study when they went to college. Some of them said engineering, nursing, and history. One girl told me she didn't know, but that her ancestors were brought over to the U.S. as slaves and that she would like to find a degree program that would address issues such as modern-day slavery. Being able to hear from students about what they had learned from my presentation and how it could impact their future was rewarding. Tecumseh Junior High has asked me to repeat this program in the spring of 2018.

STUDENT IMPACT

One of the icebreakers I used to introduce the topic of modern-day slavery was to give each student a bag of chocolate to eat. While the students ate their candy, I

talked about the harsh conditions that children have worked under in the cocoa farms of Western Africa. In some of the worst cases, children as young as five years old were forced to labor in these farms. The average day for a child working on a cocoa farm begins at sunrise and ends at sunset. This means that many of the children are unable to attend school. However, I went on to tell them how people are fighting modern-day slavery today. Individuals such as Senator Tom Harkin and Congressman Eliot Engel are two of the men who pushed for the creation of a protocol that brought to light the use of child labor on cocoa farms. Through their actions, and with the help of corporations like Hershey Company and Mars Incorporated, more people are demanding an end to child slavery ("Harkin-Engel Protocol," 2001).

CONCLUSION

Even though we took the gentle approach of eating chocolate and playing games to communicate the horrors of slavery, multiple students talked to me about how shocked they were that slavery still exists. I responded that even if they never entered a humanitarian career, they could still stand up for what is right. Who knows—in three years, the next generation of global studies students could be from Tecumseh Junior High, and if so, they may lead a revolution against modern-day slavery. I believe that inspiring young people to create social change will result in our world becoming a kinder place.

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