

Golden Rule Art Exercise & Lesson Plan

For schools and youth groups

By Gregory McKenna

“What would the world be like if everyone lived according to the Golden Rule?”

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1) Introduction

This lesson plan/art exercise is very useful for teachers, youth educators and youth leaders because it deals with themes of youth empowerment, global citizenship, social justice, non-violence, cooperation, multiculturalism, multifaith, ethics, diversity and the arts.

The goal of this program is to inspire and support young people to become global citizens rooted in the Golden Rule. This effort to engender character education in young people is achieved using creativity, imagination and the arts. This program also serves to counter the negativity that so many of us, including young people, are exposed to in modern culture.

This outline can be used as a lesson plan in schools or as an exercise with youth groups. The outline is quite detailed and contains a number of features and steps. Some teachers may wish to simplify the process by eliminating some steps. The purpose of the detail in this outline is to give educators and youth leaders an abundance of ideas and choices.

Some educators may wish to complement this outline by using additional methods and media including music, drama, trigger questions, and DVDs that focus on contemporary issues such as bullying, global poverty, diversity and the oneness of the human family.

Scarboro Missions has had a good deal of experience using this art exercise and has found it to be both effective and fun for young people.

Materials required: art paper, art supplies, Golden Rule Poster (optional)

Time required: 120 minutes or two periods of 60 minutes each (The duration can be shortened by eliminating some steps in the process.)

Grade/Age level: Grade 3 (age 9) to Grade 12 (age 18). This exercise can easily be adapted for use with young adult and adult audiences. The exercise can also be conducted with an intergenerational audience.

2) Learning objectives

To inspire and support young people:

- a) To reflect on the Golden Rule with a view to applying it in their lives
- b) To imagine a better world – a world characterized by co-operation, social justice, peace-making and a sustainable physical environment
- c) To use their artistic skills to depict this better world that they envision
- d) To develop an awareness of themselves as global citizens, that is, as members of one single, interacting, global human family.

3) Outline of Art Exercise/Lesson plan

a) Introducing the Golden Rule

After providing a brief introduction to the concept of the Golden Rule, the teacher invites the students to read silently the Golden Rule texts from 13 religions that are featured on the Scarboro Missions [Golden Rule Poster](#). Next, the students take turns reading aloud each of the 13 texts consecutively, allowing for a pause between each reading. The teacher then invites comments from or discussion among the students about what they have just experienced. *(To download the 13 Golden Rule texts free of charge for each student, see the Resources section below. The 13 texts are available in eight languages.)*

The teacher invites the students to view the Golden Rule Poster (22 x 29 inches). As an alternative to viewing the large poster, the instructor could make the smaller version of the poster (8 x 10 inches) available to each student. The instructor next initiates a discussion about the visual, symbolic and design qualities of the poster by focusing on some of its features: circles, colors, lines, overall design, centrality of the globe. The teacher may find it helpful to consult the short article, **Visual Impressions of the Golden Rule Poster**, which contains comments by various individuals about the design of the poster. *(To access this article, see the Resources section below. To view or order the Golden Rule Poster, see the Resources section below.)*

The teacher invites the students to share about any connection they see between the message of 13 Golden Rules and the design of the poster. *(If the teacher does not have access to the Golden Rule Poster, he/she can simply eliminate the teaching content about the poster and move to the next section.)*

b) Imagining a Golden Rule world

In this imagining exercise, the teacher invites the students to **“Imagine what the world would be like if every person on the planet lived according to the Golden Rule.”** To localize the focus for the students, the teacher may wish to rephrase the statement in the following way: **“Imagine what our country (or “state” or “province” or “city” or “local neighborhood” or “school” or “home”) would be like if every person in it lived according to the Golden Rule.”**

The teacher writes these words on the blackboard or chart paper. Alternatively, the words can be projected on a screen or Smart Board. The students may wish to close their eyes during this visioning experience. The length of the experience is left to the discretion of the teacher. To have the students feel more comfortable with the visioning experience, the teacher may wish to provide a background of reflective instrumental music.

After this experience, those students who so wish are invited to share verbally their vision of “a Golden Rule World”, that is to say, their vision of the global human family in which everyone lives according to the Golden Rule.

c) Depicting our global vision in artistic ways

The teacher then invites the students to actualize what they have just envisioned or imagined by creating a piece of art that depicts a world in which every person lives according to the Golden Rule.

The students are invited to use whatever shapes, colors, symbols and lines they wish. They may choose from a variety of mediums and materials, for example, pen, pencil, crayon, chalk, oil, acrylic, fabric, paint or collage. If appropriate or possible, computers can be used. The size of the art paper is left to the discretion of the teacher.

If the teacher has taught this lesson before, he/she may want to share a few samples of the artwork done in previous classes. This may help some students get started. The teacher may wish to ask some students to discuss what ideas they have in mind for their artistic creation.

Some students may wish to work individually creating a single piece of art; other students may wish to work in groups of two to four persons, creating one piece of art. Group work may be more effective with high school students than with elementary students. Working in a group will enable the students to apply the Golden Rule in their group process. A larger sheet of paper will be required to better facilitate the creativity and artwork produced by a group of students.

The students may choose to select one or more of the 13 Golden Rule writings to be placed somewhere on their artwork.

d) Sharing our art

When the task is completed, individuals and groups present their art creations to the rest of the class or youth group. The presenters may consider one or more of the following questions to help them explain their artwork:

- Why did you choose the colors you used?
- If you focused on one particular Golden Rule, why did you choose it?
- What is depicted in your artwork and what inspired you to focus your art around this idea?

- If you worked with partners on this task, share some of your group’s experience of discussion and decision-making in your efforts to develop a vision and an artistic depiction of a world according to the Golden Rule.
- How does your art creation answer the question: “What would the world be like if every person lived according to the Golden Rule?”

Following the presentations, the teacher encourages the students to share their thoughts and feelings about the art experience. Next, the students are invited to comment on their fellow students’ works of art that are now displayed throughout the classroom. For example, differences and commonalities among the art creations can be discussed.

The teacher initiates a class discussion by asking students to revisit the question: **What would the world be like if everyone lived according to the Golden Rule?**

4) Follow-up

Here are some suggested activities to follow up on the lesson plan/art exercise:

- a) The art pieces can remain displayed for a few weeks. They can also be displayed in the school lobby, school library, community library or local community center.
- b) The teacher may wish to sponsor a class-wide, school-wide, board-wide or community-wide art contest using the above lesson plan as a basis. In 2006, Scarborough Missions sponsored a **Golden Rule Art Contest** for young people that attracted submissions from around the world. *For those interested in learning more about this contest, see the Resources section below.*
- c) The teacher, community, youth group or school may wish to invite a number of students to work cooperatively to create a mural that features the themes developed in the above lesson plan/exercise.
- d) Students may wish to create a song, rap, skit, dance or flag that features the themes developed in the above lesson plan/exercise.
- e) If the teacher wishes to conduct this art exercise with a specific focus on ecological issues, she/he can consult the **Green Rule Poster** which features ecological teachings in 14 spiritual traditions. Accordingly, the students would be invited to **“Imagine what the world would be like if every person on the planet made a special effort to protect and care for our environment.”** *For more information about the Green Rule Poster, see the Resources section below.*

5) Resources

a) To download free of charge the **Golden Rule texts in 13 religions** (available in eight languages), click here: http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/sacred_texts.php

b) To view or download the article, **Visual Impressions of the Golden Rule Poster**, which contains comments by various individuals about the design of the poster, click here: http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/made_of_gold.php#appendix5

c) To view the entire **Golden Rule section of the Scarboro Missions website**, which includes a number of free educational resources, click here:
http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/index.php

d) To view or download **introductory information about the Golden Rule**, click the following links:
http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/discovering_the_gold.php

http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/understanding_golden_rule.php

http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/global_ethic.php

http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/made_of_gold.php#appendix1

e) To view or download **two Golden Rule Curricula** which contain art, drama, music, journaling and group reflection exercises, click here:
http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/curriculum.php

f) To order or get more information about the **Scarboro Missions Golden Rule Movie**, which features young people embodying Golden Rule values by way of drama, art, rap and dance, click here:
http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/animating_gold.php

g) To view a **Golden Rule interactive flash presentation** which can be used to begin the lesson plan/art exercise, click here:
http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/interactive_flash.php

h) To view or purchase the **Scarboro Missions Golden Rule Posters** for this lesson, click here:
http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/poster_order.php

i) In 2006, Scarboro Missions sponsored a **Golden Rule Art Contest** for young people that attracted submissions from around the world. For those interested in sponsoring a similar contest, click here to view some contest instructions:

j) In this excellent video, **children from many religions** recite the Golden Rule from their various faith groups. The video would be interesting for students to view near the beginning of the lesson plan/art exercise. Here is the link: <http://www.azifm.org/golden-rule/children-talk-about-the-golden-rule>

k) **“Imagine what the world would be like if every person on the planet made a special effort to protect and care for our environment.”** If the teacher wishes to conduct this art exercise with a specific focus on ecological issues, she/he can consult the **Green Rule Poster** which features sacred texts from 14 religious traditions. The 14 statements are presented against the visual backdrop of “the tree of life”. The poster is complemented by a very useful 20-page study guide. For more information or to view poster or to order these products, click here: http://www.greeningsacredspaces.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=4

l) **Commentaries on the Golden Rule**

This compilation features commentaries on the Golden Rule from a number well-known scientists, philosophers, politicians, writers, business people, religious leaders, companies and organizations. Here is the link:

http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/commentaries.php

6) **About the author and reviewers**

The author

Gregory McKenna has taught in the public school system in Ontario, Canada for more than 30 years. His pastimes include singing, gardening and playing hockey. Gregory lives near Beeton, Ontario, Canada with his wife, Cathy, and their sons, Eddie and Neil.

Reviewers

Sal Badali, Maria Ertis, Katherine Flaherty, Katherine Gillis, Marilyn Grace, Paul McKenna, Rev. Leslie Mezei, Anthony Muhitch, Katherine Murtha, Tina Petrova, Roslyn Rus, Sr. Lucy Thorson, Rev. David Warren, JW Windland

All of the above reviewers are educators who reside in Ontario, Canada, with the exception of Katherine Gillis who lives in Nova Scotia, Canada.

Scarboro Missions is grateful for the skilful efforts of all the individuals involved in this project.

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