

Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions

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Thanks for joining us these past months for Skills for Everyday Living, our series that ventured beyond the classroom to prepare students for real-world challenges. This chapter was developed by *Facing the Future*, and wraps up our series.

A measure of sustainability considers the areas of environment, economy, and society.



The Right to a Good Life

It may not seem like the quality of your life has much to do with your government. But think of all the services — schools, libraries and parks, for example — that are run by government agencies and paid for by taxes from citizens.

The government is also involved in deciding what people can do, or protecting people's basic "rights." Some rights may be so obvious that you don't even think of them as rights — for example the freedom to move around, or to think and express your own opinions. Yet these rights are not recognized by all governments. What would it feel like if the government decided that you could not hang out with certain friends or listen to your favorite music?

The Right to Vote

One of our most cherished rights in the USA is the right to vote. Many people consider active participation in local and national decisions to be an important part of a good quality of life. Yet voter turnout in past years has been relatively low.

But things seem to be changing. Right now, more young people than ever before are energized and engaged in politics. Voters aged 18 to 29 have shattered turnout records around the country during this year's presidential primary. Rock the Vote, an organization dedicated to involving youth in the political process, reports that 80 percent of young people say they are likely to vote in the presidential elections this November. Since 20 percent of the entire voting population is in this age group, young people have a real chance to shape the future of our country.

If you are old enough to vote, you can register to vote at many places such as the county courthouse or online at rockthevote.com. If you are not yet old enough to vote, you can still make your voice heard. Educate yourself about current issues and encourage voters to get out there and vote for your vision of the future!

What are some other fundamental rights in the United States? How might your life be different without these protections?

None for You, Girl!

Some rights that we consider essential for a good quality of life are not guaranteed in all places. For example, many girls and women around the world do not have equal opportunities to create a good life for themselves.

When there aren't enough resources to go around, somebody gets less. And whether the resource is food, education, income or credit to borrow money, it's most often girls and women who get less:¹

- Over half of primary school age children that are not in school are girls
- Two-thirds of all illiterate adults are women
- Women hold only 16 percent of all seats in parliaments or equivalent elected positions.

Reversing this trend — supporting equal rights for women and investing in women's education — is essential for creating a sustainable future. Think about how your family, your school and your city would be different if women were not able to go to school or get good jobs. Improving the lives of women often results in improved quality of life for entire communities.

Women in the United States have many educational and career opportunities. Yet, despite overall increasing salaries during the past century, women continue to earn less than men. Why do you think that is?

What Do You See?

You might have heard before that rights come with responsibilities. Rights are just ideas; they need people to bring them to life. We have to stand up for rights that we think are important. Otherwise, some people may not get to enjoy those rights.

You are already part of many communities, including your school, your neighborhood and maybe even some online communities. You have just as much power as anyone else to help shape your community and create a future of your own choosing where people share certain rights and freedoms.

What do you think your community will look like in 25 years? What will the environment be like? What kinds of jobs will people have? What kinds of things will people do for fun? Right now, stop reading and close your eyes for a few minutes to think about these questions.

Next, think about what you want your community (and even the world) to look like. Is this a different picture than what you think the future will be like? If so, how can we make the future you *want* happen?

What kinds of things do you think all people should have the right to do? What kinds of things would increase your quality of life and also improve the well-being of others and the planet?

Activity

❖ Think of one fundamental right that is important for a good quality of life but that you know not everyone in your community has. Consider the following questions:

- How do you envision a community where everyone enjoys this right?
- What steps can you take to move your own community towards this vision?
- What resources do you need, and who can you collaborate with?

Take Action!

❖ Visit www.facingthefuture.org and click on *Fast Facts & Quick Actions* under *Latest News from Facing the Future*. Click on *Women & Girls* and choose one quick action to help improve the lives of women and girls around the world. When women do better, everyone does better!

¹ Information from Population Reference Bureau and Save the Children (2005).