



# Elizabeth Laird’s “The Garbage King”

## Through a Children’s Rights Lens

## Teacher Introduction

This is an integrated learning resource that uses the novel, “The Garbage King” by Elizabeth Laird as a starting point to help students become aware of the concept of human and children’s rights and to provide an inspiration for students to become engaged in social action to have a positive influence on children’s rights.

### **Student-directed learning and inquiry**

Educators and governments are increasingly recognizing the benefits of student-directed learning and inquiry. Students are encouraged to explore big ideas and investigate problems, to apply critical thinking processes, to take action, and to engage in communitarianism. The teacher’s role is to facilitate students’ learning, rather than to convey information.

In a general sense, this resource promotes inquiry-based learning and students will use the novel to make connections to issues that involve social responsibility. They will learn about rights and responsibilities. The social action aspect of the resource encourages the development of a sense of altruism and encourages students to make a commitment to making the world a better place.

### **New BC curriculum connections**

Further, the resource has direct application to the learning standards of the BC Ministry of Education’s new curriculum in the following areas:

Social Studies – Global Issues and Governance Grade 6 curriculum Content areas of:

- Global poverty and inequality issues, including class structure and gender
- Roles of individuals, governmental organizations, and NGOs, including groups representing indigenous peoples

English Language Arts 6 and 7 curriculum Content areas of:

- Story/text
- Strategies and processes
- Language features, structures, and conventions

Working with this resource will help students develop the following Curricular Competencies:

Social Studies Grade 6 Curricular Competencies:

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Develop a plan of action to address a selected problem or issue
- Make ethical judgments about events, decisions, or actions that consider the conditions of a particular time and place, and assess appropriate ways to respond (ethical judgment)

English Language Arts 6 and 7 Curricular Competencies:

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking
- Synthesize ideas from a variety of sources to build understanding

- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking
- Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful literary and informational texts for a variety of purposes and audiences

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## Procedure

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### **Part 1: Novel study and learning about human and children's rights.**

Students must have read the novel and should have a good sense of the plot and characters. Using the table provided (student handout #1) students are to apply the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to the novel. The Convention is available in a student-friendly format at this link:

<https://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf>

Students should do this in groups or as partners. There are 42 clauses in the Convention so teachers might consider dividing them up and having student groups work on a limited number of clauses and then report their findings to the class.

### **Part 2: Applying children's rights and the UN Convention.**

Students follow the instructions in Student handout #2 and look for current or recent stories reported in the media where the rights of children (as set out in the UN Convention) appear to be violated. This can be done outside of class time and could be done in groups or partners.

Teachers should give students suggestions on media web sites that would be most useful (e.g., CBC, CTV, Globe and Mail, Vancouver Sun, Maclean's, as well as international sites such as New Internationalist magazine).

Stories can be local, national or international. Students can report out their stories to the class and/or submit them for teacher evaluation.

### **Part 3: Taking action on children's rights.**

Students review the web sites from four Canadian-based international agencies that focus on children's rights: UNICEF Canada, Save the Children Canada, War Child and WE.

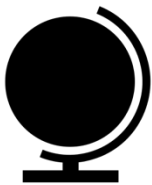
There are numerous other agencies that work in support of children's rights but these four are specific to children. If teachers want broader consideration, agencies such as Oxfam Canada, World Vision, Inter Pares, The Canadian Red Cross and Project Ploughshares are possibilities.

Student handout #3 provides a tool to analyze the agencies and decide which should be the focus of a support action. Handout #4 is an outline for action planning.

**Suggested procedure for "Part 3: Taking Action":**

- 1) Assign groups of students an agency and instruct them to use handout #3 to analyze its work in support of children's rights.
- 2) Students report, using handout #3, to demonstrate how the agency they researched works for children's rights. (Note: Teachers might emphasize that these are reports not advertisements or advocacy for the agency they are reporting on.)
- 3) After each agency has been reported on by the student groups the class should be asked to decide by vote which agency they would like to take action to support.
- 4) Once a decision has been made student groups should use handout #4 to start organizing an action plan.
- 5) When the groups have adequately addressed the action plan step, teachers should assemble the whole class to discuss the ideas that came out of the small groups. Teachers should try to focus the discussion by having students group similar ideas and try to narrow the action plan to a few manageable activities.

**Note:** Once the class has selected an organization (e.g. UNICEF Canada) it would be a good idea to contact them and let them know what you would like to do. Many of these organizations have volunteers or staff who could be a good resource for putting the plan into action.



## Student Introduction Handout

The novel “The Garbage King” by Elizabeth Laird has become a well-known best seller partly because of how the issue of the rights of children is presented. The conditions the main characters live in, as described in the novel, are quite common for many children around the world.

In recent years the United Nations has tried to improve conditions for children such as those you read about in “The Garbage King.” One of the things the UN has done is to develop and promote the “United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.” This is a document consisting of 42 “conventions” or statements that set out the basic rights of the world’s children. Almost all of the nations of the world, including Canada, have signed this convention and have therefore agreed to protect and work for these rights for children.

The document can be found here:

<https://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf>

In this learning resource you are going to do three activities that are going to help you understand and get involved in children’s rights.

1) **Understanding children’s rights:** You are going to use the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a “lens” or a way of looking at the conditions of the children in the “Garbage King.” This is to help you learn about what the rights of children as set out by the UN actually are.

2) **Applying your understanding of children’s rights:** Once you have analyzed the novel and the issues of the rights of children presented in it you are going to apply your understanding to real situations in your community, nation or world. You will be looking for media stories about present day events that appear to go against the rights of children as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

3) **Taking action:** From applying your understanding of children’s rights in part 2 you are going to see that even though the UN has a “Convention on the Rights of the Child” the rights of children are violated and ignored all the time, all over the world, including in Canada. Your task in this activity is to develop an action plan that will raise awareness of the rights of children and do something to help improve the situation.



**Student Handout #1**

In this activity, you are to think about events or situations in the novel “The Garbage King” that would be considered violations of the rights of a child as they are set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of The Child. On the right-hand side of the table, paraphrase (write in your own words) each of the articles (statements) in the convention your teacher has assigned you. On the left-hand side, next to each article that you have written on the right-hand side describe an event or situation from the novel that violates that article of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The “Garbage King” and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child Says...	In the novel “The Garbage King,” this article of the convention is violated when...
1)	1)
2)	2)
3)	3)
4)	4)



## Student Handout #2

In this activity, you are to find actual events that are happening now or happened recently that seem to violate the rights of children as described in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. You can use newspapers, TV or radio reports but media web sites such as for the CBC or CTV or newspapers are probably your best source. Your teacher will help you identify the web sites. The events can be from your local community or somewhere else in Canada or the world.

### Procedure:

1) Describe the event or situation:

In 150 to 200 words describe what has happened. Do this as if you are writing a news report.

- Where has this happened?
- When?
- What happened?
- What were the reasons as far as you can tell?
- What happened as a result. Were there consequences?

2) Describe in what way (or ways) the rights of children as set out in the UN Convention have been violated or ignored. Which specific articles of the Convention are being violated?



### Student Handout #3

In this activity, you are going to research and learn about how various organizations in Canada are working to improve the rights of children. Your teacher is going to assign one of these organizations (or perhaps one not listed) for you to research.

UNICEF Canada - <http://www.unicef.ca>

Save the Children Canada - <http://www.savethechildren.ca>

War Child - <http://www.warchild.ca>

WE - <http://www.we.org>

#### Procedure:

From the website of the organization you are researching prepare a brief presentation on that organization. You can do this as a poster presentation or power point. Your presentation should have two parts:

a) Describe the main interest or objective of this organization. Do this in the following format:

- “The organization we have researched is... (name of organization).”
- “The main objective(s) of ... (name of organization) are...”

b) Find an example of the work this organization does such as a project that addresses children’s rights.

Do this in this format:

- “An example of the work this organization does is.....”
- “This work addresses this (these) rights of children.....(refer to the Convention).”





## Student Handout #4

In this activity, you are going to create an action plan that will help the organization your class has selected do its work. Your teacher may ask you to present your ideas in a Power Point or poster display. Your action plan should consider:

- 1) Some actions your class could take to raise awareness about the organization, what it does and how it works for the rights of children.
- 2) A “big” idea for your class to work on that would raise funds for the work of this organization. Your big idea could be about supporting the organization or could focus on one of the projects of the organization.