

Children's Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan for Children, Level 1, Ages 6–8

Adapted from: *Lesson Planning Guide: World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Level One, The Funds*, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 2006
Available for download at www.core-curriculum.org/lpg.html

Activity 1: The Fountain

Spiritual Perception Objective: To reflect on the spiritual quality of generosity and how to practice this in one's life.

Instructional Methods and Learning Tools: Direct use of the Bahá'í writings; use of science; use of stories; use of arts and crafts; use of reflection

Suggested Time for Activity: 40 minutes

Materials Needed

- Story: “The Poor” from *Stories of Abdu'l-Bahá* by Jacqueline Mehrabi (on the following page)
- Large bowl, glass or goblet, large pitcher of water, additional cups for students
- Envelopes
- Markers or crayons and other art supplies as desired

Advance Preparation

Copy the following quotation onto chart paper and display in the classroom:

“We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows.... This is the secret of right living.”

Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 32

1. Welcome students. Encourage them to sit in a circle and invite them to think carefully and remember an act of service that they've seen—in Bahá'í class or at any other time—from the person sitting to the right. Allow enough time so that all students can remember a specific act of service, however small, that they've seen from the person to their right. Even if some individuals are new to the class on that day, assist all students to identify positive contributions from their designated people.

2. Invite students to share the positive contributions of their classmates. Applaud all! Explain that it is the spiritual principle of generosity that inspires us both to offer service and to notice it in others.

3. Read aloud the story “The Poor” from *Stories of Abdu'l-Bahá*. Discuss the question: In this story, how does 'Abdu'l-Bahá show the spiritual quality of generosity? What are some other examples of generosity that we've seen in our families and friends?

4. Arrange a demonstration: Place the glass or goblet in the bowl. Pour water from the pitcher into the glass until it overflows. Discuss: How does the glass display the quality of generosity? How is the pitcher also generous?

5. Pour cups of water for the students from this same pitcher. Invite the students to give their cups of water to the students on their left. Discuss: How is the pitcher helping us to be generous with each other?

6. Read aloud the posted quotation twice. Discuss: What is the secret of right living? What is the Source of all wealth and good? When we give something to others, what is the ultimate Source of that gift? How can a fountain or spring teach us about generosity? Why must a fountain empty itself? Why is it important for us to give to others?

7. Explain that all religions have funds for the purpose of giving to others. Discuss: What are some examples of people giving to funds such as these? Do we know how these funds are used? What are some ways that people raise money for such funds? What are some ways that we can give to a fund which helps those in need? Does it help to give service as well as money? (Teachers may share brief personal stories about charitable service they have given, such as helping at a food bank or soup kitchen.)

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8. Play quiet music and invite students to think silently about a way they can make a gift of money (however small) or service to a fund of their choice that helps those in need.

9. Provide envelopes and art supplies and encourage students to decorate their own envelopes to use for their contribu-

tions. Encourage them to take these envelopes home and ask their parents' help in making a contribution to a charitable fund.

The Poor

It was Christmas time and the people in London were busy buying presents. But there were some people who did not even have enough money to buy bread for their children. This made 'Abdu'l-Bahá very sad. He visited many of these poor people, helping them as much as He could.

He told the friends how there were poor people in 'Akka too. The children were often thin and ill. When they asked for a piece of bread, nobody would give them any. Hungry little children, who had not eaten anything all day, would watch people buying bread and rice and cheese from the shops, and wish that they could have some too. But the shopkeepers waved their arms and shouted at them to go away.

'Abdu'l-Bahá told the friends that one day in 'Akka some poor people had come to Him begging for food. Nearby was a grocer's shop full of good things to eat. 'Abdu'l-Bahá told them to go to the shop and take whatever they wanted. They rushed to the shop and were so hungry that they even ate the hard uncooked rice.

The shopkeeper began to shout and scream that he was being robbed, but no one took any notice. When all the people had gone and the shop was empty, 'Abdu'l-Bahá paid the shopkeeper for all that had been eaten or taken away.

Activity 2: Burden Basket

Wisdom Objective: To gain insight into the transforming effect of helping others

Eloquent Speech Objective: To develop the regular habit of contribution to the Bahá'í Funds

Instructional Methods and Learning Tools: Direct use of Bahá'í writings; use of manipulatives

Suggested Time for Activity: 30 minutes

Materials Needed

- Medium-sized basket sturdy enough to hold polished rocks, one for each student
- One or more smooth stones for each student, large enough that students can write on them
- Play money (or real coins, if desired) and small pieces of paper
- Permanent markers to write on stones
- Chart paper and marker

Advance Preparation: Write the following quotation on chart paper and display in the classroom:

“Our contributions to the Faith are the surest way of lifting, once and for all time, the burden of hunger and misery from mankind....”

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, published in *Bahá'í News* (August 1948), p. 3

1. Invite students to share examples of their own acts of service and generosity. Briefly discuss: What is the ultimate Source of all this generosity in service? Applaud all!
2. Explain that our All-Loving Creator desires “the good of the world and the happiness of the nations.” Briefly discuss: What are some good things in the world? Record student ideas on chart paper.
3. Ask: What are some bad things in the world? Record

student ideas on chart paper. Read aloud the posted quotation twice. Ask: How can bad things in the world change? Invite students to add any new ideas to the lists of good things and bad things in the world. Observe that these bad things are burdens for the whole human race.

4. Invite students to choose a burden to write on a smooth stone and, using a permanent marker, write that word on the stone. Students may choose more than one burden if desired. Then encourage them to place their stone “burdens” into the basket one at a time.
5. When all stones are in the basket, invite students to take turns lifting the basket to experience how heavy it is.
6. Read the quotation again and then ask students what will make the basket lighter. If they don't come up with the answer, provide it: “our contributions to the Faith” Discuss: What are some ways we can contribute to the Faith? Record student ideas on chart paper.
7. Invite the students to either write acts of service (contributions) on the small pieces of paper or to select play money, to place the paper money or slips of paper in the basket and remove a “burden” stone. When the basket is empty of all stones, students may again take turns discovering how easy it is now to lift the basket.

Lesson Plan for Children, Level 2, Ages 9–11

Adapted from: *Lesson Planning Guide: World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Level One, The Funds*, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 2006
Available for download at www.core-curriculum.org/lpg.html

Activity 1: Reciprocity and Cooperation

Knowledge Objective: To know from the Bahá'í writings the importance of reciprocity, mutual assistance and cooperation

Spiritual Perception Objective: To reflect on one's own role in reciprocity, mutual assistance and cooperation

Instructional Methods and Learning Tools:
Direct use of Bahá'í sacred writings; use of music; use of consultation; use of play

Suggested Time for Activity: 40 minutes

Materials Needed

- Copies of Resource Page for each student

1. Welcome students. Begin the activity with favorite songs and prayers, including a musical round, such as “God Sufficeth,” “Soon Will All That Dwell on Earth,” “Row, Row, Row Your Boat,” “Make New Friends but Keep the Old,” etc. Briefly discuss: How did we cooperate with each other in singing this round? What are some other examples of cooperation that we've seen in the world around us—in people and in nature? Why is cooperation so important?

2. Explain that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that:

“Cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Compilation on the Huqúqu'lláh*, no. 61

Read the quotation a second time, defining “cooperation,” “mutual aid” and “reciprocity.” Then briefly discuss: Can we think of some ways that all created things are closely related together? Can we think of some ways that all created things might influence each other?

3. Invite students to work together to demonstrate cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity. Encourage students to

stand in pairs, facing each other, with their hands up and open. With their feet firmly planted, encourage them to rock toward each other so that their hands meet, and then bounce back into their original position. Repeat several times. Briefly discuss: How did we cooperate and assist each other? Did we notice our reciprocal—or mutual—actions? What makes this movement fun?

4. Invite the same pairs to sit on the floor facing each other. Encourage them to touch their toes together and clasp hands; then pull each other into a standing position. Briefly discuss: How did we demonstrate cooperation and mutual aid?

5. Encourage students to form groups of 3–4 to complete the same process described in Step 4. Discuss again: How did we demonstrate cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity? Could we be successful if we didn't help each other?

6. Provide students with copies of the Resource Page at the end of this activity. Invite them to follow along as you read aloud the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Pause after each paragraph to discuss briefly: What is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá telling us? Can we think of examples that illustrate the truth of these statements?

7. Invite students to turn to the person beside them. Encourage these teams to write one true statement on the bottom of the Resource Page that uses the words cooperation and reciprocity. After allowing time for teams to write their statements, invite them to share these statements in the whole group. Applaud all!

8. Encourage students to look for examples of cooperation and reciprocity in the people around them during the coming week. Encourage them to acknowledge these actions by using the words “cooperation” and “reciprocity.”

9. Invite the students to practice using these words in sentences by stating one example of cooperation and reciprocity that they've observed in the person to their right. Go around the class, with students and teachers acknowledging the person to their right.

10. Conclude the activity with a favorite song sung in a round and prayers.

Activity 2: Material Means for Building a New World Order

Knowledge Objective: To become familiar with some of the current Bahá'í-sponsored projects around the world

Spiritual Perception Objective: To discern the interconnection between the development of the Cause of God and the peace and unity of the world

Eloquent Speech Objective: To articulate the importance of using material means for building the world order of Bahá'u'lláh

Instructional Methods and Learning Tools: Direct use of Bahá'í sacred writings; use of consultation; use of crafts

Suggested Time for Activity: 60 minutes

Materials Needed

- Copies of “Choose Charity” (worksheet from *Brilliant Star*, March/April 2007, following page)
- Chart paper and markers
- Strips of colored paper
- Stapler
- Glue
- Tape
- Scissors
- Wrapping paper
- Construction paper or other colored paper
- Other art supplies, as desired
- Shoe box or other small sturdy box for each team
- Articles about service projects – from local, national or international Bahá'í newspapers, newsletters, magazines or websites about the Bahá'í World Center, houses of worship, Bahá'í schools, Bahá'í centers and Bahá'í activities such as study circles, children's classes, etc. (Two good sources are www.Baháí.us/social-action and <http://news.Baháí.org/>)

Advance Preparation

- Consider the interests of your students and select articles from the sources mentioned above to engage the minds and hearts of your students. Have more articles than students so students will be able to have some choice in the article they read.

- Write the questions in Step 2 on chart paper for student reference.

1. Distribute copies of the worksheet “Choose Charity” (from *Brilliant Star*, March/April 2007) to pairs of students. Read the introduction and instructions aloud in the large group together. Have pairs then solve the puzzle together. Invite one or more partners to share the answer aloud upon completion. Invite a student to write the answer quotation on the board or chart paper.

[Answer: The Bahá'í Writings say that charity is “pleasing and praiseworthy” and is a “prince among goodly deeds.”]

2. Invite students to learn about projects in which people help others in need, practicing “charity.” Organize students into small teams. Invite teams to select an article about a local, national, or international Bahá'í or other charitable project and find answers to the following questions:

- What is the project?
- Where is it?
- Who does it serve?
- How is the project supported?

3. After allowing students time to work, encourage teams to share information about their project. Acknowledge all.

4. Invite each team to create a diorama about their project:

- Decide on a few simple shapes—trees, buildings, people, etc.—to cut from colored paper to represent the project.
- Line the box with colored paper.
- Wrap the outside of the box with colored paper or wrapping paper.
- Cut the objects from colored paper, remembering to cut tabs. Fold the tabs and glue, tape or staple them to the box to create a 3-dimensional display.
- Label each display with the name of the project.

5. As students complete their work, invite them to collaborate with other teams, as desired.

6. Invite students to conclude the activity with favorite songs and prayers.

Choose Charity

Helping people in need is a great way to show your love for humanity. When you practice charity—giving your time, money, or things to people who need them—you help establish justice in the world. You also bring joy to others and yourself.

Can you guess what Bahá'u'lláh said about charity?

To find out, look at the eight picture boxes below. Find each one in the larger image. Watch out—some of the boxes are rotated. Under each box, write the correct letter of the column (ovals) and the row (rectangles) where it's located. Then read the letters in order to discover the answer. The first picture box has been done as an example.

The Bahá'í writings say charity is "pleasing and praiseworthy" and is a:



" P R CE G LY S "

A G O H D I E P

L O D E N M R

A G O H D I E P

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Lesson Plan for Children, Level 3, Ages 12–14

Adapted from: *Lesson Planning Guide: World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Level Three – Huququ'lláh and the Bahá'í Funds*, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 2007
Available for download at www.core-curriculum.org/lpg.html

Activity 1: The Source of Wealth

Knowledge Objective: To know that crafts and professions are the source of wealth

Wisdom Objective: To understand the purpose of wealth

Spiritual Perception Objective: To discern that human life is subject to changes and chances

Instructional Methods and Learning Tools: Direct use of Bahá'í sacred writings; use of science; use of consultation; use of memorization; use of independent investigation

Suggested Time for Activity: 60 minutes

Materials Needed

- Index cards or small pieces of paper
- Ice cube and glass of water
- Birthday candle or other small candle and match
- Copies of Resource Page
- Student journals or plain paper
- Simple art supplies, as desired

1. Welcome students and invite them to share favorite songs and prayers. Explain that this set of lessons will explore ways that we can contribute our time, our material resources and our talents to make the world a better place.
2. Invite students to think of a time that they contributed to something important and to nod their heads silently when they're ready.
3. When all are ready, distribute index cards. Encourage students to keep that memory in mind and to write their name on the card along with five spiritual qualities, talents or skills that enabled them to make this contribution: What did the contribution require of them? Teachers may also complete these cards.
4. Collect the cards, shuffle them and distribute them randomly. Invite each student to read aloud the list of qualities, talents and skills on the card. Invite other

students to guess who wrote the card. Affirm correct answers.

5. After all cards have been guessed, post them in the classroom as a reminder of some of the gifts of the people present. Briefly discuss: Why is it so important for us to contribute our gifts to the world? Listen carefully. Affirm that giving brings us joy and makes life better for the people around us.

6. Drop the ice cube into the glass of water and light the candle. Invite students to observe what happens to the candle, ice and water. Allow sufficient time for changes to become obvious, then discuss: Why do things change? What doesn't change? Are changes good or bad?

7. Listen carefully to student comments. Then affirm: Although the candle and ice cube seem to disappear, they also fulfill their purpose. They lose their solid existence and gain the ability to cool a drink or give light. Continue the discussion: What would happen if we kept the ice cube in the freezer and the candle in a drawer? How are we like a candle or an ice cube? Why should we start making our contributions to the world now rather than wait until we're fully grown with jobs and families?

8. Distribute copies of the Resource Page. Invite volunteers to read these quotations aloud in the whole group. Then discuss the focus questions.

9. Encourage students to select one of the quotations to record in their journals or on plain paper and decorate as they like.

10. Encourage students to work in pairs to memorize all or part of their selected quotations using repetition, rhythm, melody, pictures to replace words, or another favorite method. Invite teams to recite their memorized quotations in the whole group. Applaud all!

11. Encourage students to take home their copies of the Resource Page, share them with their parents or other adults, and invite those adults to respond to the focus questions.

12. Conclude the activity with favorite songs and prayers.

Resource Page

Activity 1: The Source of Wealth

Focus Questions:

What is the source of wealth?

What is the purpose of wealth?

What does it mean to say that “results depend upon means”?

Is there only one kind of wealth? Why or why not?

What is more important than having lots of things? Why?

O My Servants!

Ye are the trees of My garden; ye must give forth goodly and wondrous fruits, that ye yourselves and others may profit therefrom. Thus it is incumbent on every one to engage in crafts and professions, for therein lies the secret of wealth, O men of understanding! For results depend upon means, and the grace of God shall be all-sufficient unto you. Trees that yield no fruit have been and will ever be for the fire.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian no. 80

O My Servant!

The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian no. 82

Man's distinction lieth not in ornaments or wealth, but rather in virtuous behavior and true understanding.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 57

Say: Rejoice not in the things ye possess; tonight they are yours, tomorrow others will possess them. Thus warneth you He Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, paragraph 40

Activity 2: Wealth and Poverty

Wisdom Objectives: To understand the purpose of wealth; to appreciate the transforming power of contributing to the Bahá'í Fund

Instructional Methods and Learning Tools: Direct use of Bahá'í sacred writings; use of creativity; use of peer teaching; use of independent investigation

Suggested Time for Activity: 60 minutes

Materials Needed

- Copies of Resource Page
- 5 pieces of paper
- Simple art supplies
- Masking tape, if desired
- Stuffed animals, pillows or other objects, if desired
- Student journals or plain paper

Advance Preparation

The demonstration in Steps 2–7 is written for a small class of five or fewer students. If you have a larger class, involve all students by having each student represent a smaller portion of the U.S. population.

Display the following quotation in the classroom:

“The wealth of the other world is nearness to God.”
‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 231

1. Invite students to explore questions of wealth and poverty by focusing on the population of the United States. Provide the class with ten sheets of paper. Invite students to work together to sketch a simple representative of 10 percent of the U.S. population on each piece of paper, so that all papers show diversity of ages, ethnicities, abilities, etc.
2. When students have completed their sketches, place the papers in a row on the floor or mount them on a wall to represent all the people in the United States. Invite each student to say one thing that they admire about this representation of the human family.
3. Inform students that one percent of the population owns about 34 percent of the wealth in the United States. Invite one student to sit on the floor in front of three sheets of these papers.

4. Then explain that 10 percent of the population owns about 71 percent of the wealth in the United States. If your class has five or fewer students, invite that same student to lounge on the floor to block access to seven of the ten papers created by students.

5. Explain that all the rest of the people share the remaining wealth. Encourage the rest of the class to crowd in front of the three remaining papers. If your class is smaller than five, ask students to hold stuffed animals, pillows or other objects to represent a crowd of people squeezed into a small space.

6. After allowing a few moments for students to experience the contrast between too much space and not enough, invite students to return to their usual places and discuss: How did it feel to be the wealthiest? How did it feel to be all the rest? What would be more comfortable?

7. Distribute copies of the Resource Page. Organize students into two teams. Encourage each team to focus on one of the quotations, read their assigned quotation twice, and discuss the focus questions.

8. Then encourage teams to think about their pictures of the population of the United States. Encourage teams to use these pictures as visual aids to share their answers in the whole group. Applaud all!

9. Briefly discuss: If this imbalance of wealth needs to be corrected in the United States, what do we think needs to happen in the whole world? Why?

10. Then invite each student in the room to read aloud the posted quotation.

11. Encourage students to discuss in pairs: Why do we think that wealth in the next world is nearness to God? What can we do in this world to help increase our wealth in the next world?

12. Provide students with their journals or plain paper. Encourage them to copy the posted quotation into their journals and to write their reflections about wealth in this world and wealth in the next.

13. Conclude the activity with favorite songs and prayers.

Resource Page

Activity 2: Wealth and Poverty

Focus Questions:

When is wealth good? When is it harmful? What should be changed?

What should wealthy people do to bring a better balance?

What should poor people do to bring a better balance?

What should middle-income people do to bring a better balance?

Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor—in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society—its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 24–25

We see amongst us men who are overburdened with riches on the one hand, and on the other those unfortunate ones who starve with nothing; those who possess several stately palaces, and those who have no where to lay their head. Some we find with numerous courses of costly and dainty food; whilst others can scarce find sufficient crusts to keep them alive. Whilst some are clothed in velvets, furs and fine linen, others have insufficient, poor and thin garments with which to protect them from the cold.

This condition of affairs is wrong, and must be remedied....

When we see poverty allowed to reach a condition of starvation, it is a sure sign that somewhere we shall find tyranny. Men must bestir themselves in this matter and no longer delay in altering conditions which bring the misery of grinding poverty to a very large number of the people. The rich must give of their abundance; they must soften their hearts and cultivate a compassionate intelligence, taking thought for those sad ones who are suffering from lack of the very necessities of life.

There must be special laws made dealing with these extremes of riches and of want.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, pp. 151–53

Lesson Plan for Young People, Ages 15–19

Learning Objectives:

- To become familiar with facts related to children's poverty, lack of health coverage and the pipeline to prison crisis in America
- To perceive one's potential and responsibilities as a youth to be a force for the common good
- To become familiar with a variety of projects, involving Bahá'í youths, that serve urgent needs of humanity
- To perceive what spiritual qualities and attitudes are necessary in order to successfully solve problems of injustice facing children and youths
- To pledge oneself to an action that will contribute to bringing hope and a better tomorrow for every child

Suggested Time for Lesson: 90 minutes

Materials Needed

- *A Children's Concerns Primer* (from *Children's Sabbaths Manual, Vol. 18*)
- Optional: *In Service to the Common Good, Bahá'í Youth in Their Own Words*, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 2005 [download from www.Bahai.us/in-service-to-the-common-good or purchase from Bahá'í Distribution Service (BDS) at www.Bahaibookstore.com]
- Copies for small groups of students:
 - “Snapshot: Media Training Pilot” (from *In Service to the Common Good, Bahá'í Youth in Their Own Words*)
 - “Snapshot: Umoja Souljah” (from *In Service to the Common Good, Bahá'í Youth in Their Own Words*)
 - “Learning, Spirit, Service Are Fruits of Blackberries” (from *The American Bahá'í*, Nov/Dec 2008)
- Chart paper, easel, chart markers
- Highlighters, pens/pencils
- Small “pledge” cards (plain or decorated)

Welcome students. Consider opening with music and singing, and favorite prayers and passages, such as those in

Passages and Prayers from the Bahá'í Writings Related to *Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow* (see *Children's Sabbaths Manual*, Vol. 18).

Introduce the theme of the lesson: *Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow*, and a brief introduction to the purpose and history of the Children's Sabbath sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund. (See www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageNavigator/Childrens_Sabbaths)

1. Present some of the facts on the status of children in poverty, without health coverage and in the pipeline to prison from the *Children's Sabbaths Manual*, Vol. 18, Section 2. Consider charting a few important statistics and reading aloud the “snapshots” of individual children's stories.
2. Invite individuals to share their personal experiences, either as having experienced or seen these unjust conditions or working to help. Invite students' comments on how they, as youth, can help remedy these conditions and “bring hope and a better tomorrow.”
3. If available, present a copy of the document, *In Service to the Common Good, Bahá'í Youth in their Own Words*. Provide a brief introduction of this project, which looked at Bahá'í youths' involvement in service to the world of humanity and interviewed youth from across the U.S. Invite one or two participants to share what service projects they themselves have been involved in, if this is true for your group.
4. Tell students that they will be dividing into three groups, each to look at different ways Bahá'í youths in the United States have served their communities. The goal will be identifying ways each of these activities can potentially impact the issues of poverty, lack of health care and children caught in the pipeline to prison.
5. Divide students into three groups, giving each group copies of *one* of the following resources:
 - “Learning, Spirit, Service Are Fruits of Blackberries”
 - “Snapshot: Media Training Pilot”
 - “Snapshot: Umoja Souljah”

Bahá'í Resources for the Children's Sabbath

- 6.** Ask each group to read about this activity in which youth are involved and then prepare a 1- to 2-minute presentation to tell the full group about it, including reflections on how this project can help bring hope and a better tomorrow to children and junior youths. Encourage groups to consider using the arts, such as a dramatic skit, a poster or storyboard, song or other media in their presentation.
- 7.** Gather all together. Invite each group in turn to present their synopsis and explain how the activity they read about can address the challenges of poverty. Celebrate all presentations.
- 8.** Ask each individual to consider an action that he/she might be able to carry out, inspired by these projects or others, to create change in the life of a child who is experiencing poverty, lack of health coverage or is caught in the pipeline to prison. Provide simple pledge sheets on which each person can write down the action they wish to take. Collect these, mix them up and read them aloud, as the collective pledges to action of this group.
- 9.** Encourage those who wish to learn more about the issues plaguing humanity and the Bahá'ís' response to study any of the following documents and/or to visit these links (chart these for the group): www.Baháí.us/social-action or www.Baháí.org/dir/social_action/sed.

Additional Documents for Youth Study

The Bahá'í Faith is thoroughly concerned with the renewal and advancement of society. Bahá'u'lláh's writings are directed towards effecting a transformation in the spiritual and material conditions of humankind. To learn more about the Bahá'í Faith's commitment to human rights, social and economic development, the status of women, and moral development and its involvement in such efforts, go to www.bahai.org/dir/social_action.

The following series, published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States in 2004, 2005 and 2006, respectively, may be downloaded from: www.Bahai.us/in-service-to-the-common-good or purchased from the Bahá'í Distribution Service (BDS) at www.BahaiBookstore.com or 1(800) 999-9019:

- *In Service to the Common Good, The American Bahá'í Community's Commitment to Social Change*
- *In Service to the Common Good, Bahá'í Youth in Their Own Words*

- *In Service to the Common Good, Aligning Development with the Forces of Progress*

The Bahá'í International Community is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that both encompasses and represents the worldwide membership of the Bahá'í Faith at the United Nations. The following documents from the Bahá'í International Community are available for download at www.bic-un.Bahai.org/list.cfm:

- *Global Action Plan for Social Development*
- *Human Rights and Extreme Poverty*
- *Religious Values and the Measurement of Poverty and Prosperity*
- *Role of Youth in Human Rights*
- *The Prosperity of Humankind*
- *The Violence-Free Family: Building Block of Peaceful Civilization*

Learning, Spirit, Service Are Fruits of Blackberries

By Tom Mennillo, October 3, 2008

Mr. Tom Dude.

That's what the girls want to call me.

So that's what I am this late September Friday evening as I listen in on their junior youth group's weekly meeting.



Talia Floyd introduces herself to me over the phone during the Blackberries' weekly meeting as Tykiera Simmons (left) and Amy Desai look on.

The 11- and 12-year-old girls hail from a Baltimore, Maryland, neighborhood. Many attend the same school. Blackberry is the name the group goes by. Think pancake filling, not electronic devices. They chose it during a memorable sleepover.

The girls introduce themselves quickly:

There's 12-year-old Rose Casciero, who does Irish step dancing;

Sarah Goodman, 11: "I'm extremely political;"

Talia Floyd, 11, who loves to read and dance.

Her twin, Jadzia Floyd, likes to take pictures. In fact, she's doing so with abandon this evening. You can see some of her work on this page. Gaia Bethel-Birch, Eria Goodweaver, Tykiera Simmons and Grace Brown also say hello, along with animator Geri Lynn Peak and assistants Amy Desai and Diana Vaughan.

Between each introduction, someone mimics a trumpet flourish: Duh duh duh DAAAA. Giggles also abound. The energy from anticipating a visitor can do that. Some

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Rose Casciero introduces me to her foot while I listen in on their weekly meeting.

of that energy burns off as the Blackberries continue learning a song Geri Peak leads.

“Let all associate, therefore, in this great human garden,” they sing. It fits this group well: half Black and half White, and sprinkled with Christians, Jews, Bahá'ís—even a “goddess worshipper” and a Druid.

“How many junior youth groups can say they have a Druid?” Peak says, chuckling. “Bring it on.”

All I know from afar is their voices blend well, especially on this song. I ask, only half joking, “Did you put on a recording to fake me out?”

Geri inquires whether I want to ask the girls any questions. I do, indeed. “Why did you join the group?”

Gaia: “Friends from school told me about it and I joined, and it's cool.”

Sarah echoes the last point: “Friends, happiness, everything!”

What is it you learn?

Sarah, who says up front she's “not a Bahá'í,” explains: “I like the virtues and the writings.”

Jadzia: “It's easier to stop backbiting when you have people around to help you.”

What activities help you learn these things?

Talia: “We have a devotional thing before we start. We pray and meditate. A lot of times we learn a quotation.” Talia explains a game helps them memorize the quotes.

“First you say the quote and repeat it. Then when we've kind of got it, everyone has to say a word. We go around

and finish the quote like that and have to do it faster and faster.”

Tykiera, a newcomer to the group, likes what the study of *Breezes of Confirmation* is doing for her.

Sarah, too: “*Breezes* is like a story talking about confirmation and what it means, and that's really cool.”

Adds Jadzia: “It also has activities you can do, like using all the words [from a quote] in a sentence.”

What do you talk about in group sessions?

Sarah: “We talk about random things, then about virtues and the book. We're all like friends so we know what we're all talking about.”

Diana Vaughan indicates they talk often about service and how to incorporate it into their lives.

“We did a bake sale in the square,” Gaia relates.

“We did pretty good and gave the money to the Great American Bake Sale [to benefit homeless children]. That was fun.”

A side benefit to the bake sale was that friends of Gaia asked about the group and whether they could join.

How does service make you feel?

Sarah: “Whenever I do something for charity, I feel like this warm happy feeling. And I think about the person and wonder if they're happy now that we've done this for them.”

A final question: How do you like the group being all girls?

Talia: “Sometimes it's better for us to be able to talk girl talk.”



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Jadzia: "Boys can be really annoying."

After a lemonade break, it's on to consultation.

Aptly enough, tonight's the first televised presidential debate and the girls' school held a mock debate that day. How did the school debate go?

Talia: "Some kids got mad and stormed off." But with consultation, Talia says, "You can just put forward your ideas instead of arguing for them."

Sarah adds that if during consultation not everyone likes your idea, "You don't feel bad, because it's now part of the group. It's not yours. It's a group effort."

In fact, the girls agree, maybe putting their heads together they can come up with something better than any member could have alone.

And that's just what happens.

The topic: Dues.

Peak explains it takes money to have group activities. As expected, the girls begin talking about how much they should contribute and how often. Then, as consultation will, things take a different turn.

One girl mentions she and her brother sell crafts at fairs. She volunteers to contribute her half of the proceeds to the Blackberries. Others come up with things they can make and sell, and suggest places—such as a holiday fair—to sell them. An assistant to the animator collates the ideas and writes them down. The girls vote for the first three they'd like to do.

All of a sudden it's kind of quiet in the room. Geri comes on the phone to explain. The girls have bolted outside to cool off. That's my cue to leave. After all, the debate's about to start on TV. But I can't ring off without expressing my appreciation. And as I think that, I hear a chorus over the phone.

The girls have come back in to sing out, "Goodbye, Mr. Tom Dude."

No—it's till next time, Blackberries.

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Snapshot: Media Training Pilot

(from *In Service to the Common Good, Bahá'í Youth in Their Own Words*)

If a group of youth makes a film about their community, might they think differently about that place? What if those young people are Navajo, already studying spiritual development and Navajo culture?

The Native American Bahá'í Institute (NABI) in Houck, Arizona, is asking questions like these, exploring new possibilities for its own role in the local community.

Activities for youth and elders such as rug-weaving, the Moccasin Game, and study of Navajo language and spiritual development are already underway there. NABI staff also visit reservation residents frequently, carrying news and ideas to extended families in their home compounds.

Starting in April 2005, plans were developed for an exciting pilot project: train youth to film interviews with two renowned Navajo artists—Chester Kahn, a sculptor, painter and jewelry designer; and Knifewing Segura, a police officer and kick-boxer turned musician. For two weeks, the young people researched and filmed the interviews, then edited them into a feature that was shown at a community gathering.

It was a learning experience. One young man said, “You can spectate all you want, but unless you check it out yourself, you don’t know the whole story, you see?” A young woman said, “Before this I might have gone to the library. We had to go out there and find answers. You all forced me to do something I didn’t want to do, but I liked doing it.” A staff member suggested, “It took courage to do that.” “Yes, it did,” the young woman agreed.

Craig Rothman, a project planner and member of the National Spiritual Assembly’s Media Services Department, sees the program as experiential education. “If you can teach youth something through their own experience, they retain the knowledge more deeply than they are likely to do in a study group,” he says. “Video was one tool. It could have been anything, as long as it involved the youths’ experience. They had to learn to research, consult together, work as a team. They saw their community as a resource and a place that had a lot to offer them. In the end, they produced a film with heart, humanity and humor, and they became stronger people.”

“I liked the parts best where we would talk,” a participant says. “We talked a lot! We had to decide what parts to put in, and how to edit them.” Other participants nodded in agreement when one said, “I liked it when I got to use the camera. We spoke with these people who I thought would be different because they’re famous. But first you learn about them and then you get to interview them.”

The response to the film’s screening was enthusiastic: The chapter president, a post similar to that of mayor, said he planned to show the film to the Chapter Council so they could see the positive things young people are doing. Parents and grandparents expressed —some tearfully— their pride in the youths’ accomplishment.

Planning for more projects like this one is underway.

Snapshot: Umoja Souljah

(from *In Service to the Common Good, Bahá'í Youth in Their Own Words*)

Umoja, in Swahili, means unity. Souljah is a play on the words soul and Jah—Swahili for God. Put together, the Umoja Souljahs are finding ways of consecrating their souls for God, in unity. For nearly ten years, the Bahá'í Unity Center in Decatur, Georgia, has been home to this group, oriented to meeting the needs of young Black men of any faith background who live in the neighborhood.

The basic needs of the young men who live here reflect the realities of life in a hard environment: how to deal with the police, for instance. One of the group's founders tells of being confronted by a police officer, who told him to leave the restaurant where he was having dinner. The young man respectfully insisted on his right to be there. Seeing that the officer was not budging, however, he left peaceably, and later wrote a letter about the incident to the mayor and the chief of police. Within days, a letter came back from the mayor with apologies for the officer's actions. He tells this story to show there are alternatives, and that sometimes taking the peaceful route can produce a greater effect.

Sharing stories like this, and others drawn from African American history, lies at the heart of the program, together with the seven Kwanzaa principles* and recreation in the gym at the Bahá'í Unity Center. The aim, according to Anthony Outler, the group's coordinator, is to help the young men and boys answer two questions: What does it mean to be a Black man in this society? Who are you, given the experience of Black people in America?

Chris Inman, currently studying accounting in college, recalls, "It was one of the greatest things that ever happened to me. As a kid in the inner city, there aren't too many influential Black males around. The Unity Center was the main place we could go, especially Friday nights, to play basketball. After that, we had this big discussion on different topics—strong topics that were crucial for my life."

"Most of the guys, we still keep in contact. They were some of my best friends, and we are still strong. We are still the same type of people."

Lawrence Ivory, 13, says, "I've learned about the past, about slavery, and about the Negro. I've learned some of the quotes that Malcolm X was saying about slave history. I've learned how to think critically and many more things."

What's next? "Our dream is to turn this into a school for young Black men," says Anthony Outler. "When we look at the number of Black men incarcerated, disenfranchised, or involved with drugs, the numbers are staggering. Many people have marches or empowerment programs, but they can only take the Black community so far. They don't have the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh says we should be 'a defender of the victim of oppression.'"

* The Seven Kwanzaa Principles: 1. *Umoja* (Unity) 2. *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination) 3. *Ujima* (Collective Work & Responsibility) 4. *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics) 5. *Nia* (Purpose) 6. *Kuumba* (Creativity) 7. *Imani* (Faith)