

SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER



RFK DEFENDERS

VIDEO VIGNETTE ACTIVITY 3: KA HSAW WA

TOPIC

A HERO HOLDING CORPORATIONS ACCOUNTABLE

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Define and explain "corporate social responsibility"
- Identify what comprises "community"
- Identify the human rights abuses associated with Unocal's activities in Myanmar
- Explain Ka Hsaw Wa's actions to address these abuses
- Analyze several examples of irresponsible corporate behavior
- Apply standards of social responsibility to evaluate the business practices of a local business or corporation

OVERVIEW

In this activity, students learn about the activism of Ka Hsaw Wa and his battle to hold an American corporation accountable for the human rights abuses and environmental destruction it committed in Myanmar as a result of its business activities there. Students investigate the concept of "corporate social responsibility" and how it has been practiced—or neglected—in various case studies, including in their own communities today.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- Article 1: Right to Equality
- Article 2: Freedom from Discrimination
- Article 3: Right to Life, Liberty, and Personal Security
- Article 4: Freedom from Slavery
- Article 5: Freedom from Torture and Degrading Treatment
- Article 8: Right to Remedy by Competent Tribunal
- Article 23: Right to Desirable Work and to Join Trade Unions
- Article 25: Right to Adequate Living Standard
- Article 30: Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the above Rights

TARGET AUDIENCE

Social Studies, Language Arts, Fine Arts, Grades 9–12

ACTIVITY DURATION

Two 45–60 minute class periods

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- Economic interdependence is a defining feature of today's global economy.
- In a market-oriented economic system, the fundamental objective of businesses is to maximize profits.
- Citizens can advocate for businesses to consider the welfare of the community when deciding how to conduct business activities.
- In recent years, the concept of "corporate social responsibility" has emerged within the business community to encourage businesses themselves to look out for the community's welfare.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- To what extent are businesses obligated to consider the welfare of the communities where they do business?
- When considering the concept of "the welfare of the community" what is included?
- How can ordinary citizens hold businesses and large, powerful corporations to high standards of corporate social responsibility?

MATERIALS

- Computer with internet access and projector
- Student devices with internet access, one per student
- **Ka Hsaw Wa's Activism** student worksheet, one per student
- **The Fight for Corporate Social Responsibility** student worksheet, one per student
- **Corporate Social Responsibility in Our Community** student worksheet, one per student

BACKGROUND INFORMATION/LINKS

Ka Hsaw Wa is a member of the Karen ethnic group in Myanmar, formerly called Burma. At the age of 16, he was tortured by Burmese military forces for information about a friend's whereabouts, inspiring him to organize a student-led, pro-democracy uprising against the government two years later. The uprising was brutally suppressed, and Ka Hsaw Wa was forced to flee. He went into hiding in the jungle, where he witnessed many human rights abuses committed by the military as part of their contract with American oil company, Unocal. Unocal had contracted with the Burmese government to provide security and infrastructure for its natural gas pipeline project and disregarded the forced labor, torture, rape, and murders committed by the contracted government forces against the indigenous people of the area. Ka Hsaw Wa spent years traveling through the jungle, interviewing these indigenous people in order to document the atrocities and provide the information to international human rights organizations.

Ka Hsaw Wa co-founded EarthRights International (ERI) to fight for human rights and the environment in Burma and elsewhere. Ka Hsaw Wa believes that the most vulnerable people across the globe are those who live in areas of great natural resources that large corporations want to exploit. In 1997, ERI sued Unocal on behalf of several anonymous indigenous victims, using the Alien Torts Claims Act, an obscure 1789 law that gives foreigners the right to sue in U.S. court over violations of international law. After a long legal battle, Unocal agreed to settle the case in 2004, paying millions of dollars in damages to the people and communities harmed by Unocal's activities. The case set an important

legal precedent, and ERI and other activists use it today to enforce “corporate social responsibility,” holding corporations accountable for the effects of their business activities on communities.

- [EarthRights International](#)'s website, featuring biographical sketch of Ka Hsaw Wa and an overview of *Doe v. Unocal*
- Overview of [Corporate Social Responsibility](#) by *Business News Daily*
- Overview of the [Alien Torts Statute](#) by the *Center for Justice and Accountability*
- Human Rights Defenders' Interactive Map

This activity is sequenced in four phases: Ask, Analyze, Apply, and Act:

- **Ask:** Students discuss and define “corporate social responsibility”, “welfare of the community” and “global economic interdependence.” (Day 1: 15 minutes)
- **Analyze:** Students read secondary source material to understand Unocal's activities in Myanmar and the resulting human rights abuses and environmental degradation and watch Ka Hsaw Wa's video vignette to identify and evaluate his efforts to remedy those abuses. (Day 1: 30 minutes)
- **Apply:** Students use internet resources to gather information about several other historical cases involving corporate social responsibility and compare them to the case of Unocal. (Day 2: 20 minutes)
- **Act:** Students write, analyze, and evaluate the corporate social responsibility of a community business and write letters to those businesses commending their actions or recommending changes. (Day 2: 25 minutes)

PRE-ACTIVITY PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

- Preview the Ka Hsaw Wa video vignette
- Print student worksheets
- Consider posting the following links in an online format for easy student access:
 - EarthRights International
<https://earthrights.org/about/>
 - General Motors' work for South Africa's Apartheid Regime (1980's–1990's)
<https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJ0E82007720120301>
 - Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire (1911)
<http://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/story/fire.html>; <http://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/legacy/legislativereform.html>
 - Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (2010)
<https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/winners-and-losers-in-deepwater-horizon-payout#gs.10yeBkE>
 - IBM's work for the Nazi Regime (1933-1940)
<https://www.itbusiness.ca/news/ibms-darkest-chapter-controversy-over-second-world-war/16394>
- Consider how you will group students for independent study and jigsaw group work. If your class does not have 1:1 devices, have students work in groups to do research and share their findings with the class.
- Do some research before class to identify some state and local businesses that have comprehensive websites.

PROCEDURE

Ask (Day One–15 minutes)

1. Post and introduce the following focus question for the lesson: “Do businesses, which exist to make money and whose success is essential to American prosperity, have an obligation to protect the communities in which they operate? If so, to what extent? If not, why not?” Facilitate a brief class discussion of the question.
2. Have students work in pairs to brainstorm a few responses to the following questions:
 - What do you think “corporate social responsibility” means? How can you tell if a business is conducting itself responsibly? How can you tell if a business is failing to do so?
3. Present the definition of “corporate social responsibility” as a company’s awareness of the impacts of their activities on the rest of society and the environment, with the goal of sustainable development. Facilitate a brief class discussion to unpack the meaning of this definition.
4. Explain that issues of corporate social responsibility are especially complex when corporations take their business activities beyond their home country’s borders. Ask students why that might be the case. Suggest the following:
 - When companies operate far from their home communities, their actions have less of an impact on their employees and customers, making misbehavior less visible.
 - In addition, these activities take place outside the direct influence of the home nation’s laws and regulations, making misbehavior easier and with potentially minimized consequences.

Analyze (Day One–30 minutes)

1. Show students the video vignette of Ka Hsaw Wa; students should record notes on the **Ka Hsaw Wa’s Activism** student worksheet. (Explain that Myanmar was formerly called Burma and is ruled by a repressive military dictatorship.)
2. Lead a discussion of the video, being sure to pose the following questions:
 - What is Ka Hsaw Wa’s background? Was he trained to be an activist when he first got started? What inspired him to become an activist?
 - What actions did Ka Hsaw Wa take to fight the abuses of Myanmar’s military dictatorship?
 - What sacrifices has he made to be a defender of human rights?
 - How successful was Ka Hsaw Wa in getting justice for the people of Myanmar? How did he achieve this success?
 - What lessons can we learn about activism from Ka Hsaw Wa?
3. Explain that students will be analyzing several examples of failures of corporate social responsibility, beginning with the Unocal case.
4. Using the EarthRights International website (<https://earthrights.org/about/>), have students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to gather more information about the Unocal case.
5. Together as a class, fill in Row #1 of **The Fight for Corporate Social Responsibility** student worksheet.

6. Lead a brief discussion about the ethics involved in the Unocal case, being sure to address the following questions:
 - If the atrocities were being committed by the Myanmar military forces providing security, should Unocal have been held responsible for them?
 - Should foreign citizens be permitted to use the U.S. court system to sue American companies that operate in their countries?

Apply (Day Two–20 minutes)

1. Students continue their analysis of cases involving poor corporate social responsibility. Assign each student to study one of the cases using internet resources and filling in the corresponding row of **The Fight for Corporate Social Responsibility** student worksheet. (Note: For the purposes of differentiating instruction, the cases are listed in the order of the difficulty of the reading, from least to most complex.) Cases include:
 - General Motors' work for South Africa's Apartheid Regime (1980's–1990's)
<https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJ0E82007720120301>
 - Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire (1911)
<http://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/story/fire.html>; <http://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/legacy/legislativereform.html>
 - Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (2010)
<https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/winners-and-losers-in-deepwater-horizon-payout#gs.1OyeBkE>
 - IBM's work for the Nazi Regime (1933–1940)
<https://www.itbusiness.ca/news/ibms-darkest-chapter-controversy-over-second-world-war/16394>
2. Once all students have completed their case analysis, reorganize students into jigsaw groups consisting of 4 students, with each student having studied one of the cases. Students will share what they learned with their group mates, and everyone will complete **The Fight for Corporate Social Responsibility** student worksheet using that information.
3. Facilitate a brief review of the class findings to draw some conclusions about the similarities among the cases and their significance: How have ordinary people held corporations responsible for the impacts of their business activities on the community and environment?

Act (Day Two–25 minutes plus Homework)

1. As a class, brainstorm a list of large businesses and corporations in your community. (Do some research before class to identify some businesses that have comprehensive websites.)
2. Direct students to work in pairs or small groups to investigate one of the businesses to answer the questions on **Corporate Social Responsibility in Our Community** student worksheet. Students should use the business' website, in addition to news articles identified through an internet search engine.

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3. Students should then work independently to write a letter to their assigned company that either:
 - a. thanks the business for its good citizenship and corporate social responsibility, providing specific examples, or
 - b. respectfully asks the business to increase its social responsibility by addressing a specific problem or issue and suggesting possible solutions.
4. Ask several volunteers to read their letters aloud during the next class.

Connections

Connect to Student Lives	Connect to Contemporary Events	Connect to the Future
Issues of fairness and environmental protection are likely to resonate with today's young adults.	Cases of corporate social responsibility continue to be in the news today, such as issues surrounding LGBTQ+ customers and industrial pollution.	This activity encourages students to think about the impact of businesses on their own communities and to engage in basic activism through letter-writing.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

College, Career & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards

D1.5.9-12 Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources.

D2.Civ.7.9-12 Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others.

D2.Civ.10.9-12 Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

D2.Civ.12.9-12 Analyze how people use and challenge local, state, national, and international laws to address a variety of public issues.

D2.Civ.14.9-12 Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

D2.Geo.5.9-12 Evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions.

D3.1.9-12. Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

D4.6.9-12. Use disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses to understand the characteristics and causes of local, regional, and global problems; instances of such problems in multiple contexts; and challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address these problems over time and place.

D4.7.9-12. Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy identification, and complex causal reasoning.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

W.11-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

W.11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

KA HSAW WA'S ACTIVISM

Directions: While watching the video vignette about Ka Hsaw Wa, jot down notes in response to the questions below.

What inspired Ka Hsaw Wa to become an activist?

What human rights abuses occurred in Myanmar as a result of Unocal's natural gas pipeline project?
Why did these abuses occur?

What actions did Ka Hsaw Wa take to fight the abuses of Myanmar's military dictatorship:

a) before he fled to the jungle?

b) after he fled to the jungle?

What sacrifices did Ha Hsaw Wa make to be a defender of human rights?

What lessons and inspiration do you think we can draw from Ka Hsaw Wa's example?

THE FIGHT FOR CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Directions: As you learn about each case of corporate irresponsibility, fill in the table below.

Corporation	Consequences of Business Activities for Human Rights	Description of Activism Against Human Rights Consequences	Outcomes of Activism (Short- and Long-Term)
Unocal (1990s-2000s)			
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire (1910s)			
IBM and the Holocaust (1930s-1940s)			
General Motors in Apartheid South Africa (1980s-1990s)			
Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (2010s)			

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN OUR COMMUNITY

Directions: Use internet resources to research your assigned corporation. Use your company's website, as well as news articles you can find through a search.

What is the name of the company/business?

What type of work does the business do? What are its major activities?

Does it have a corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy? If so, describe it.

How does the business benefit the community?

Are there any ways in which the business harms the community?

If so, how might the business address these problems?

Do you think this business is a productive or nonproductive corporate citizen of the community? Justify your response.