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# INTRODUCTION

In Mission: Democracy, the Living History Forum is using history to help students learn about the present, challenging them to reflect on democracy, tolerance and human rights. All within the framework of the Swedish national curriculum and the democratic aim of the education.

Surveys have shown that there is a clear correlation between students' attitudes and the number of lessons dedicated to democracy and human rights. In other words, when it comes to attitudes, it really matters how much a student has worked on issues such as human rights within a historic context.

Mission: Democracy, derives from the Swedish government's action plan to safeguard democracy against violence-promoting extremism. It consists of 22 workshops intended for classroom use covering three themes: **democracy, tolerance and human rights.**

## **Safeguarding democracy**

In this context the Living History Forum is working with preventive measures to safeguard the democracy. Using the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity as a starting point. Through historic events and personal accounts in the workshops, the students are encouraged to discuss and to reflect on current social issues.

The material is interactive and gives teachers the option of choosing exercises and adapting them to their own group of students and teaching situation. Teachers are also free to create a structure that is suited to their own context and teaching style.

## **Integrated part of the education**

*Mission: Democracy* has been designed to work on a general level as well as for subject teaching (geared primarily towards social science, history, religion and the Swedish language). The Living History Forum conducts teachers' training courses and the material is free of charge. The aim is to get the teachers to use the educational material as an integrated part of the regular education, not as a once-off crash course in democracy.

*Mission: Democracy* is set up in such a way that the teacher could choose to select some of the 22 workshops, or to use them all. Each workshop consists of various exercises. Some proceed from texts, others from pictures, still others from films and there are a large number that proceed from the student's own preconceptions. The methods for working and for presenting the results of the work vary as well.

The workshops consist of equal parts of facts and value based exercises and they feed into the Swedish curriculum both if one looks at the knowledge requirements and the task of the school to promote respect for human rights and fundamental democratic values and norms.

### **To learn from history**

The material is intended for students in their final year of compulsory education and the upper secondary schools. *Mission: Democracy* is supposed to complement the education and serve as an additional asset to the teachers. It is up to the teacher to decide how to use the material in the most efficient way. The workshops could be used as a starting point, a wrap-up or in the middle of a specific subject course.

What might set the Living History Forum apart from other comparable institutions and public authorities is the use of history, the Holocaust and other historic crimes against humanity, as a starting point to encourage students to reflect on the present and to discuss social issues of today. The aim is to make the students learn from history, not just about history.

Another goal is to encourage students to think critically and to reflect upon their own actions and responsibilities. Anti-democratic behaviour is nothing new. The Holocaust and other crimes against humanity are the ultimate consequences of such behaviour and developments that led up to these events could teach young students what preventive measures are needed to safeguard a democratic society.

"The best way to protect the democracy is to engage people in the democratic process. The objective of *Mission: Democracy* is to provide material that will support and favour democratic values and that will encourage young people to get engaged, to get involved and to learn more", says Karin Wiström, project leader at the Living History Forum in Sweden.

## Obligations and rights

However, to learn about democracy is not only to learn about each individual's freedoms and rights. To acquire knowledge about each individual's social and democratic obligation is equally important.

One of the greatest challenges is to conduct democratic discussions on rights and tolerance in a class full of students with different backgrounds, different religions, different upbringing and different ethnicities. Teachers might find intolerance against homosexuals, Muslims, immigrants and Jews in almost every class. Equally teachers might find representatives from these minorities in almost every class.

And as soon as one starts breaking down what equal rights and freedoms really means, the discussions could get very sensitive.

"As a teacher you must be prepared for some really tough discussions. Democracy and democratic values are no easy subjects and our workshops could help facilitate that these discussions be conducted in a respectful way. Because if we avoid talking about it – who knows where we will end up? And if we don't talk about it, could we then truly say that we stand by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that we are working towards an open and tolerant society? We hope that our workshops will help teachers take the discussions into the classroom and shape today's young people into responsible adults of the future", Wiström says.

## Important feedback from teachers

For the best possible outreach Living History Forum strives to involve people in various positions of the educational system. The material is spread through teachers' training courses, the Living History Forum website, conferences and meetings with local politicians and principals. Thus ensuring that the objective of *Mission: Democracy* is well-anchored, from the bottom to the top.

However, *Mission: Democracy* doesn't stop with the 22 workshops. It is a material based on the experience of the teachers and therefore their feedback is important in order to update, modify and develop the workshops. The aim of the Living History Forum is not only to be an asset in providing material and information, but also to be a forum where teachers can become inspired by the best practices of other teachers.