

Defenders of Human Rights

THE DALAI LAMA. Wangari Maathai. Elie Wiesel. Such names are synonymous with justice and freedom around the world. What better way to teach students about human rights than through their stories? Speak Truth To Power, a free online resource, uses the personal narratives of courageous individuals called “defenders” to explore human rights issues and abuses, including police brutality, genocide, and child labor.

The site, based on the book *Speak Truth To Power: Human Rights Defenders Who Are Changing Our World* by Kerry

Kennedy, is a project of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights. The center partnered with the New York State United Teachers to create a curriculum for grades 6–12 written by teachers across New York state.

The centerpiece of the curriculum is 17 lessons, each delving into a particular human rights issue through the life of a prominent defender. For instance, students learn about free expression and religious freedom through the Dalai Lama, who has championed freedom for Tibet. To learn about environmental

rights, students read the personal narrative of Wangari Maathai, Kenya’s leading environmentalist and women’s rights advocate. And to learn about genocide, students can turn to the profile of Elie Wiesel, who has written extensively about the Holocaust.

Lessons also include suggested activities for students, such as research projects and letter-writing campaigns, as well as questions teachers can pose to stimulate further discussion. Videos and photographs of each human rights defender are available at the site, as well as a timeline of human rights milestones and a glossary of terms such as *asylum*, *censorship*, and *xenophobia*.

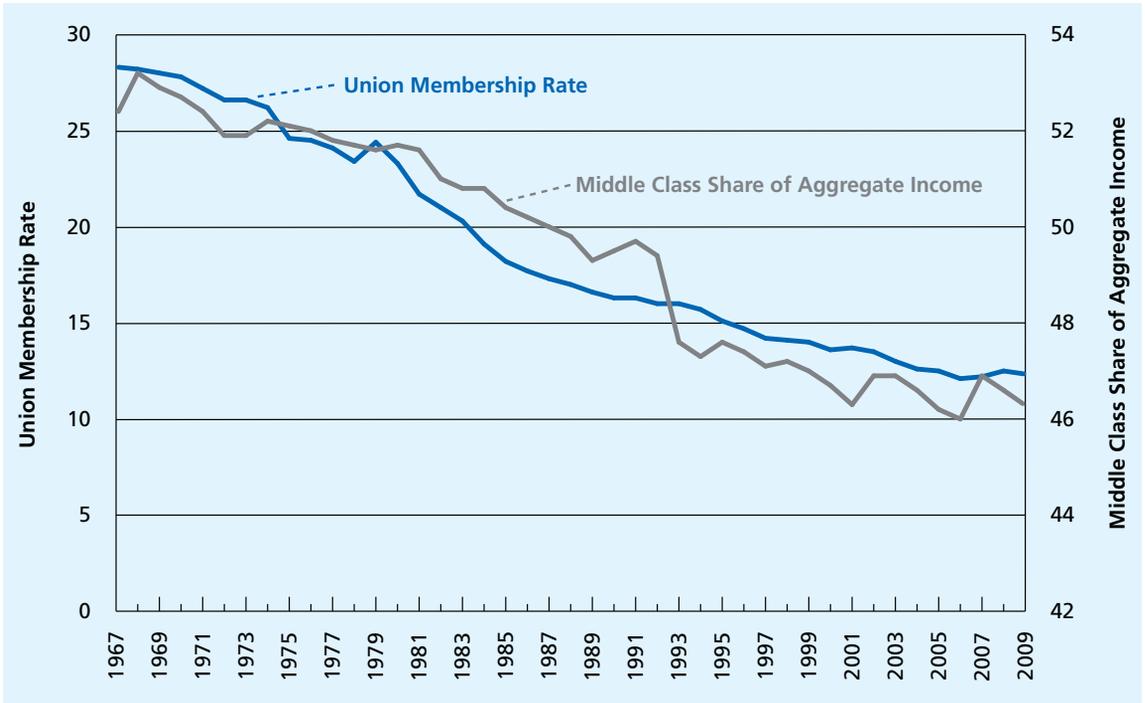
To visit the Speak Truth To Power website, go to www.rfkcenter.org/stp. For webcasts and blog posts, go to <http://blogs.nysut.org/stp>. To download the curriculum, go to http://locals.nysut.org/speaktruth_curriculum_complete.pdf.

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The Middle Class: Union Made

UNION MEMBERSHIP is essential for building a strong middle class, according to a recent report published by the Center for American Progress. *Unions Make the Middle Class: Without Unions, the Middle Class Withers* explains how unions promote political participation and ensure that workers are paid fairly, thereby strengthening the middle class. As the chart to the right shows, the decrease in union membership over the past 40 years is closely tied to the decrease in the middle class's share of the



nation's income. As the report explains, "The middle class weakened over the past several decades because the rich secured the lion's share of the economy's gains." The report attributes the decline in union membership to a changed political and legal landscape that has prevented

workers in the private sector from exercising their right to join a union. Visit www.americanprogressaction.org/issues/2011/04/unions_middle_class.html to download the full report and access related research, including a map with state-by-state data.

SOURCES: AUTHORS' ANALYSIS. UNION MEMBERSHIP RATE IS FROM BARRY T. HIRSCH, DAVID A. MACPHERSON, AND WAYNE G. VROMAN, "ESTIMATES OF UNION DENSITY BY STATE." MIDDLE CLASS SHARE OF AGGREGATE INCOME IS FROM UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU.

How to Do Peer Assistance and Review

FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS looking to establish Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) programs, an online user's guide provides just the tools and information they need. The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education has created a free, comprehensive website (available at www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/par) that outlines the many benefits of PAR, a program that relies on consulting teachers who excel in the classroom and are released from teaching duties to mentor new teachers and support struggling veteran teachers, as well as make recommendations to a committee on whether the teachers they are working with should remain in the profession. The committee is typically made up of teachers and administrators, and cochaired by the union president and

a high-level district administrator. PAR is a true labor-management partnership in that union and district officials jointly oversee all aspects of the program.* The website draws on the PAR programs of seven school districts: Cincinnati, Ohio; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Montgomery County, Maryland; Rochester, New York; San Juan, California; Syracuse, New York; and Toledo, Ohio. Each program's history, specific design, and lessons learned are highlighted. The site's authors emphasize that these programs are examples only: "There's no simple recipe for PAR," they write. "There's no guarantee that what works in one setting will work in another." To that end, the site answers several practical questions such as whether PAR can be adopted at the bargaining table, if

principals should help plan PAR, and how districts pay for the program. The site also includes links to contract provisions, research and conference papers, and sample documents relating to PAR.



*For an article on PAR from the Fall 2008 issue of *American Educator*, see www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2008/goldstein.pdf.

Russia's Hermitage Museum Comes to the Classroom

THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM in St. Petersburg, Russia, widely considered one of the world's best museums, offers seven free online courses for students through its Virtual Academy (visit www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/06/hm6_2.html). The courses, based on works at the museum, cover a variety of time periods and topics: medals, Rembrandt, ancient Rome, biblical subjects, the Winter Palace, knights, and ancient Egypt. The course on Rembrandt, for example, begins with a brief biography, explores his life as a collector and painter, explains the social and political context in which he lived, and then discusses many of his major paintings and prints. The image below shows the course's introduction to *Abraham's Sacrifice*. The underlined words—*Abraham*, *patriarch*, and *Old Testament*—all link to a glossary that provides definitions

and background knowledge.

The course on ancient Egypt is just as extensive, covering geography, history, religion, architecture, and writing. The image below left provides a glimpse of

content on pyramid construction. The course on the Winter Palace offers a fascinating way to begin learning Russian history. The image below right explains the origin of the name the Hermitage.

Science in Summer

STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' curiosity about the natural world—chemistry, weather, marine life, and more—doesn't end when summer begins. It may only grow as school vacations provide time to explore. Two online science resources, the Jason Project and the National Science Foundation's special reports, are sure to fascinate students and teachers alike.

The Jason Project offers in-depth information on topics such as extreme weather, geology, energy, and ecology. The site (visit www.jason.org) uses photographs and videos as well as stories about real-life scientists and current events to simplify complex ideas and introduce students to important terms, such as *atmosphere*, *supercell*, and *lightening*, which appear in "Operation: Monster Storms," the site's weather curriculum. All of the units are designed as "operations," complete with games and digital labs that take students on "missions" as they learn about plate tectonics, physics, and more. For full access, be sure to register (it's free and quick). Once you are logged in, you'll enter Jason's Mission Center, shown above right.

The National Science Foundation's special reports (available at www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports) examine a variety of topics—including climate change, dead zones, and jellyfish—through detailed descriptions, quotes from leading researchers, and videos. Several of the reports seem specially designed to appeal to those students who have yet to discover how fascinating science is: for example, there are reports on the many sciences embedded in NFL football and NASCAR racing. Even the reports that first appear more traditional, like "Chemistry Now," have interesting twists, such as proceeding from the chemistry of water to that of cheeseburgers and chocolate.



Book Club for Teachers

LOOKING FOR A WAY to connect with, and learn from, colleagues across the country? Join the *Education Week* Teacher Book Club. Just go to www.edweek.org/tm/section/bookclub/index.html to sign up. Four times a year, staff members select a noteworthy book, post a book backgrounder (which is really helpful in deciding whether to buy the book and participate), and arrange a three- to five-day online discussion with the author and club members.

The next book, which will be discussed the week of July 18, is Mike Schmoker's *Focus: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning*. A former English teacher,



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administrator, and football coach, Schmoker does not fall for faddish reforms; he emphasizes good instruction and high-quality instructional materials.