

# Jane Addams Raising Up the Poor

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This lesson plan includes a brief biography of Jane Addams, which describes her pioneering efforts in social work, a new profession which she helped to create. This lesson would be appropriate for students in grade four or five and would require from seven to ten class periods to implement. The references cited at the end of handout (page 16) serve as historical background for teachers who wish to learn more about this important woman in the history of public health, childcare, and social work. Resources Needed: Map of the United States; World map; Figure 1 (classroom activity) and Figure 2 (handout).

## Objectives

1. The students will be able to describe the many contributions Jane Addams has made to America.
2. The students will be able to identify problems in their community that they could help change for the better.
3. The students will be able to identify problems in their community concerning the homeless and the hungry and learn from a social worker what programs are available to help these people.
4. The students will contribute to a project and willingly work with the class to make a change in their community.
5. The students will list contributions they personally have made or can make to make a difference in their community.
6. The students will be able to roleplay characters making a difference in the world.

## Procedures

1. *“Whip Around” Topic:* Community Problems and Values. Have the students individually think of a problem they see in their own neighborhood,

school, or community that affects their life. Quickly go around the room and have each person describe a problem. Students who wish to pass may do so.

2. *Mini-Lecture:* Using the answers given in the Chain Whip activity, talk about ways the problems they have mentioned could be avoided. Have there been changes in the recent past that have affected the students? For example: Have the students seen an increase of crime in their community? If so, what is being done about it? Is there a problem with litter around their streets? Is the situation improving, or is the problem getting worse? Do they help the situation or do they add to the problem? Has a program been implemented recently to help the homeless? Tell the story of Jane Addams, using the background information above. Talk about the different problem issues Jane saw and the contributions she made in Chicago to make things better.

3. *Numbered Heads Together:* Remind the students of the story of Jane Addams. The rules and the questions you



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can use for this activity are on the sheet provided (see Appendix A).

4. *Learning Journal:* In a learning journal have the students write an entry each day describing their feeling about the topics they discuss. Encourage the students to write how they would feel if they were in the same situations that you discuss in class each day or what they want to do to change the situation.

5. *Think-Pair-Share:* Have the students individually think of what they would do if they didn't have enough money to even eat. Are there places to go get help? In pairs have the students share their thoughts and feelings. As a large group make a class list of what they would do and where they think they can get help. Be sure to emphasize that it has taken a lot of great people to make the changes

so we don't have as many problems in America. This doesn't mean we don't have families without homes and food but the problem is not as bad because of changes that have been made.

6. *Guest Speaker:* Have a social worker come and talk to the class about the things in their job that make life better for the people who don't have enough money. What programs are available to help? (Talk about their Think-Pair-Share ideas to see if they were on track.) Where can people go to get help? Is the public aware of the services available?

7. *Service Learning Project:* There are many ideas for a service learning project. I will list a few suggestions. In every town there is a crisis center or a home for the homeless, (or at least one that is close by). The social worker who comes to your class can tell you things that are needed in these centers. You could make a quilt (or more than one) as a class and give it to a center. You could go to a shelter and help serve food to the people that come.

You could adopt a block or road that is often littered and pick it up every couple of weeks. You could make flyers for the services that are available to the community to make the citizens more aware of help they can receive.

8. *Role Playing:* Have the students act out different situations involving the helping

of others or the improvement of their community. Have them use the knowledge they have acquired through the story of Jane Addams and from the social worker. Give small groups a scenario for them to roleplay. Some examples:

- They are walking down the street and they see an area that could really be cleaned up.
  - They see a homeless person. What will they do to help this person? (e.g., Where is the nearest provider of free food and emergency shelter?)
  - They are making things that they will give to a center.
  - They have just contributed a great service to their community and are being recognized.
  - They want to fight for an out-of-date law to be changed. (The way Jane Addams changed child-labor laws and improved housing for the poor.)
- After role-playing, have the students discuss how they felt as they acted out the various roles. Be sure to hear the point of view of the one in need and the one helping the one(s) in need.

(**Note:** This could be a sensitive issue in for some of the children in your school. Be careful to not intimidate children in your class who may be receiving some of the services you may mention. Also, as you work through each of these lessons, remind students that even the small contributions can make a big difference toward solving a social problem).

## Assessment

1. Contributions to the Chain Whip and list of ideas will be assessed informally through observation.
2. Learning Journals will be assessed periodically. Since this journal has a lot to do with how the student felt, there may be a few students who want to keep some entries private. If there are pages the students don't want read, they can fold them, and the teacher shouldn't read them. As long as something was written for that day, award points for the writing assignment.
3. Children's willingness to work on a service-learning project can be assessed according to verbal reports given to you by other adults.
4. Questions that are numbered should be assessed.
5. Observe children's participation in role-play. Are they able to utilize some of the knowledge they have received earlier in the lesson?

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*Famous People / Mini-Curriculum Units were created by students in elementary education course 405, Teaching Social Studies, Department of Elementary Education, Utah State University, Winter, 1997.*  
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Figure 1

## Numbered Heads Together

**This is an activity for developing positive interdependence and for mastering the content.**

1. Have students number off, one through four, and form small groups according to each number.
2. Pose a problem to solve or give questions to be answered.
3. Ask students to work together so everyone knows the answers and can explain them. (For the team to do well everyone has to know the answers.)
4. Call out a number. The student with that number answers the question for the team. Choose how you want it to be answered (orally, thumbs up or down, in writing, on the board.)
5. Have the group process their work. How did you make sure everyone in your group know the answer? What helped? What did not help?

*Adapted from Deborah Byrnes, Feb. 6, 1997*

## The Story of Jane Addams and Hull House

Hull House was founded in 1889 by Jane Addams, along with her friend Ellen Starr. Jane had a very compassionate heart from the time she was a young girl. Everywhere she went, Jane had a desire to help people less fortunate than herself. Jane's father helped shape her to become more charitable to others less fortunate. Even as a young girl Jane wanted to know why all people didn't live in nice homes with yards like her own. One day she saw a part of town that was run down and she could hardly believe that people could live in such "horrid little houses." That day Jane decided that she wanted to live in a large house in the middle of an awful place like she had seen. Jane wanted to do this so she could make a difference in the lives of people who lived there.

### Early Years

Jane Addams was born on September 6, 1860, in Cedarville, Illinois. One year later the War between the North and the South started. That same year the telegraph lines reached coast to coast. While Jane was a young girl, President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated.

Jane had the opportunity to go to Rockford Female Seminary at the age of seventeen. It was there at Rockford that Jane decided she wanted to be a missionary in the United States to help the poor. Jane went to Rockford for four years and was an excellent student. She received the highest grades out of every member in her class. Jane enjoyed having fun but was also of a serious nature.

### Painful Problems

After Jane graduated from Rockford she decided she wanted to be a doctor and work among the poor. Jane went to Philadelphia to go to medical school and because she worked so hard she became ill, suffering from a pain in her back. (This pain had occasionally bothered her as a girl.) Jane ended up having to stay in bed, strapped to a board, for six months so her back could heal. After Jane recovered from her illness, she still had to wear a tight brace to stop the strain on her back. This brace helped Jane so she wasn't in pain all the time. Her doctor thought a trip to Europe would help her recover, so in August 1882, Jane went to Europe for a vacation.

In Europe Jane visited many places, including Ireland, Scotland, and different cities in England. Jane enjoyed London and particularly enjoyed a wax museum called Madame Tussaud's waxworks. While in Europe Jane also studied languages: German, Italian, and French.



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One Saturday evening in London Jane and her friends were in a poor part of town, and someone told them they would see the late Saturday evening food sale if they stayed. It was a law that food couldn't be sold on Sunday, so Saturday evening the peddlers would auction off the fruits and vegetables that were left over. It was there that Jane saw a sight she would never forget. The poor swarmed around the peddlers offering every penny they had for the leftover food. The food was moldy, bruised, and dirty, but the people didn't care, and many of them sat right there and ate it. Jane wondered if there was anyone around to help these people.

While Jane was in Germany, she saw women carrying large beer canisters on their backs across snowy walkways. The beer was steamy hot and would splash onto the women's faces and hands. Many of the women had scars on them from the burns. Jane could hardly contain herself and ran to the brewery and yelled at the owner. The owner didn't care, and told Jane to mind her own business. These examples of human suffering affected Jane deeply.

### A New Idea in a New World

After several years in Europe, Germany and Spain, Jane

decided it was time to do the dream of her childhood. She would return to Chicago and open a large home in an impoverished part of town. At last, her dream would become a reality.

In September 1889, Jane and two of her friends fixed up an old house on Halsted Street. The old home, once owned by a Mr. Charles Hull, had been surrounded by gardens and oak trees. Now the building was surrounded by some of the worst slums in Chicago. Jane considered all who lived around her new neighbors and wanted nothing more than to help each of them. From the beginning Jane invited women over for tea—and the boys and girls in to paint, act out plays, write stories, play games, and sculpt with clay. Jane felt that everyone enjoyed beautiful things and pursuing creative hobbies that they were not often given the chance to do. Jane was able to speak with most of these new immigrants because she had studied their languages.

### Immigrant Life and Death

Jane learned much from the people who came to Hull House. Immigrants would come and talk with Jane and Ellen because they could speak their own language. There was one Italian woman who got very excited to see a vase of roses on the table because she had not seen flowers in America. She thought they were fresh from Italy. Many immigrants thought that all of America was like their poor neighborhood. They didn't understand there was something else out there.

In the first year that Hull House was open, fifty thousand people visited there. In the second year there were two thousand people who visited every week. People who came to Hull House considered it their home, and they would walk in as if it were their own. As people with more income learned about Hull House, they wanted to



help. Some would send money while others would come and teach or set up clubs.

Jane and Ellen delivered babies, set up a day care for young children, took care of the sick, and counseled people with problems. They also taught English classes so the immigrants could become citizens and helped find relatives of new immigrants who simply stopped at the door. Jane and Ellen wouldn't just stay in their nice home. They were often out helping their neighbors with anything they might need

help with. While helping with her own neighborhood, Jane fought for the child labor laws to be changed. She advocated for laws that would limit working hours for women to eight hours a day, helped set up the first juvenile court, and strove to improve housing for the poor. Jane and her colleagues established the first public playground in Chicago.

### A Nobel Prize

In 1931 Jane Addams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She served as president of the league from 1915 to 1929.

Over the years Hull House expanded to be a full block. Jane influenced many people. On May 1, 1935, when Jane Addams died, many of those people were there to say good-bye. Jane had given her life and all she had to make the lives of the less fortunate better. 🌐

### References

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Photo courtesy the Library of Congress

Figure 3

## Discussion Questions

1. Why did Jane Addams care what happened to people less fortunate than herself?
2. What experiences did Jane Addams have that affected the opening of Hull House?
3. Given the information you know about Jane Addams, why do you think she was considered compassionate?
4. What training helped Jane Addams to be able to influence so many people?
5. Compare the things being done now (think of the things you learned from the social worker) to the contributions made by Jane. Are the things the same or different? Explain your answer.

*Adapted from Deborah Byrnes, Feb. 6, 1997*