CELEBRATING THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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The date was chosen to honor the United Nations General Assembly’s adoption on 10 December 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) the first global statement of international rights principles. Here are some ideas for simple yet meaningful ways to celebrate the rights and responsibilities that we all share as human beings.

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more.

All of us have the right to express ourselves. In addition we all have a responsibility to make sure that everyone else in our group also has the freedom to express him/herself. How can we cooperate to make sure that this right is respected in our group?

Learn about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
View the videos on your Agents of Change Manual stick drive. You can watch the short videos, discuss together and propose ways of integrating human rights values into your lives. Younger students will love the animated video version of the UDHR even when they don’t understand what all the words mean.

For a more historical view, check out The Story of Human Rights.

Check out the UDHR plain language version or Amnesty International.

The book We Are All Born Free (15 of the illustrated pages of the book can be found on The Guardian’s website if you want to look at them online or print them out.

More information at: http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/
School wide Activities

*Make a Helping Hands Wreath* to symbolize the responsibility we all have to help each other. Trace hands on different color construction paper. Cut out the hand shapes and glue or staple them on a paper plate to make a wreath.

*“Human Rights Tapestry” Exercise your right to freedom of expression!* Draw pictures together of the rights and freedoms that are important to you. You can make your own “Human Rights Tapestry” by drawing on index cards and using a hole punch to make holes in each corner. Use yarn to tie together the cards to make a tapestry. You can also make posters or collages.

Adapted from humanrightswarrior.com

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**HUMAN RIGHTS TREE**

Participants work cooperatively to create an image that helps to define human rights and human needs.

**TIME:** 30+ Minutes  
**MATERIALS:** Art Supplies, chart paper  
**SETTING:** Schools – Adult Groups

**Procedure**

1. Ask participants, working in small groups, to draw a tree on large chart paper. Write on the tree (in the form of leaves, fruits, flowers, or branches) those human rights that they think all people need to live in dignity and justice. A human rights tree needs roots to grow and flourish. Give the tree roots and label them with the things that make human rights flourish. For example, a healthy economy, the rule of law, or universal education.

2. When drawings are complete, ask each group to present its tree and explain its reasons for the items they have included.

**Going Further**

1. Match the fruits, leaves, and branches with articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and write the number of the article next to each item.
2. Display these trees in the classroom or in public places.
3. Identify rights concerns that are of particular concern to you and your community.

*Source: Amnesty International-Austria*
PART A: What Does It Mean to Be Human? (20 minutes)

1. Write the words "HUMAN" and "RIGHTS" at the top of chart paper or a blackboard. Below the word "human" draw a circle or the outline of a human being.

   Ask participants to brainstorm what qualities define a human being and write the words or symbols inside the outline. For example, "intelligence," "sympathy."

2. Next ask participants what they think is needed in order to protect, enhance, and fully develop these qualities of a human being. List their answers outside the circle, and ask participants to explain them. For example, "education," "friendship," "loving family." (Note: Save this list for use in Part B)

3. Discuss:
   - What does it mean to be fully human? How is that different from just "being alive" or "surviving"?
   - Based on this list, what do people need to live in dignity?
   - Are all human beings essentially equal? What is the value of human differences?
   - Can any of our "essential" human qualities be taken from us? For example, only human beings can communicate with complex language; are you human if you lose the power of speech?
   - What happens when a person or government attempts to deprive someone of something that is necessary to human dignity?
   - What would happen if you had to give up one of these human necessities?

4. Explain that everything inside the circle relates to human dignity, the wholeness of being human. Everything written around the outline represents what is necessary to human dignity. Human rights are based on these necessities.

   Read these sentences from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and explain that this document sets the standard for how human beings should behave towards one another so that everyone’s human dignity is respected:

   ...recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of the freedom, justice, and peace in the world...

   Preamble

   Universal Declaration of Human Rights
All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 1
Universal Declaration of Human Rights

PART B: What Is a Right? (20 minutes)

1. Brainstorm for the many meanings "right" can have (e.g., "correct," "opposite of left," "just.") Consider common expressions like "We’re within our rights" or "You have no right to say that." Record these different meanings on the board. What is the meaning of "right" when we speak of a human right?

2. In small groups or all together, brainstorm a definition for human rights and write these possibilities on the board. Try to evolve a definition that everyone can agree upon and write it on a chart sheet by itself.

3. Write on the board this definition of human rights:
   Human rights belong to all people regardless of their sex, race, color, language, national origin, age, class, religion, or political beliefs. They are universal, inalienable, indivisible, and interdependent.

   - What is meant by universality? By inalienable? By indivisible? By interdependent? Ask participants to look up these terms in a dictionary or in A Human Rights Glossary, Part V, "Appendices," and explain their meaning to the group.

3. Look back at the list of qualities that define a human generated in Part A.

5. Write "SURVIVAL/SUBSISTENCE," "HUMAN DIGNITY," and "CONVENIENCES AND LUXURIES" on another chart or blackboard. Discuss the meaning of these terms. Consider the chart made in Part A. Place each item listed as necessary to fully develop human qualities under one of these headings. For example, is education necessary to survival? To human dignity? Is education a convenience or a luxury?

6. Discuss:
   - Should human rights address only what a human being needs to survive? Why or why not?
   - Should human rights also protect those things you classified under "conveniences and luxuries"? Why or why not?
   - Some people in the world have only what is necessary to survive while others have luxury and convenience. Is this situation just? Is it a human rights violation?
   - Can something be done to equalize the enjoyment of human dignity? Should something be done? If so, how? And by whom?

PART C: What Is a Universal Right? (20 minutes)

1. Read the comments of Eleanor Roosevelt, Chair of the UN commission that drafted the UDHR, on the importance of universal human rights standards:

   Where, after all, do universal rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.
Eleanor Roosevelt
The Great Question, 1958

2. Discuss this passage:
   - What do you think Eleanor Roosevelt means by "universal rights"?
   - Some people feel that universal values or standards of behavior are impossible. What do you think?
   - Why do you think the UN chose the word universal instead of the word international when naming the UDHR?
   - Paraphrase the final sentence of the quotation. What does it say about individual responsibility for human rights? What do you think Eleanor Roosevelt means by "concerned citizen action to uphold" rights close to home?

Going Further
1. Introduce the UDHR, explaining that this document was intended to offer all people in all situations the equal justice, opportunity, and dignity of which Eleanor Roosevelt spoke. Then give a brief history of the UDHR. See Part I, A Short History of Human Rights for background information or use this as a reading.
3. Pose the question "What does it mean to be alive?"
   - When does life begin? When does life end?
   - Should the right to be living ever be taken away by the state?
   - Is the right to live a human right?
   - When do human rights begin and end?
4. Discuss the relationship between human dignity, human rights, and the concept of "humane treatment."

Adaptation For younger children –
1. Ask children sitting in a circle to think of a quality about themselves that they consider a good quality. Using a talking stick or simply speaking in turns, ask each to describe that quality briefly.
   - Note that everyone has good qualities.
   - If children have difficulty generating qualities about themselves, ask "What are some qualities we admire in people?" and write a list of responses on the board. Have each child pick one that is true for her or him.
2. Ask some of these questions:
   - Do you respect in others the quality you like about yourself?
   - Do you respect good qualities in others that you do not have?
   - Do all human beings deserve respect? Why?
   - How do you show respect for others?
3. Ask children if they can remember a time when they felt hurt because someone did not respect them.
   - Did someone say something insulting or hurtful to you?
   - Why do people sometimes say bad things to each other?
   - What is dignity? Is your dignity hurt when others do not respect you? How does it feel to you?
4. Ask the group how human beings differ from other living creatures. Emphasize that human beings communicate with words, not just sounds, and that they decide many things about their lives.
Use the outline in Part A.

4. Ask "What does it mean if we say that all human beings deserve respect because they all have human dignity?"

6. Explain that after a terrible war, World War II, all the countries of the world agreed in 1948 on a document that said the world would be more peaceful if everyone respected the dignity of every human being. These words are contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Read the quotations given in Part A, Step 4.

7. Ask children to think of one example of how life in their community could be more peaceful if people showed greater respect for each other.

8. Have children work in pairs or alone to illustrate one way they could show respect to someone. Share these ideas with the rest of the class.