



“Close to Home” - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Teaching Guide and Resources



The UDHR in different UN official languages (UN Photo)

Historical Background and Overview

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations' General Assembly in 1948. It was the first attempt to create a global standard of human rights – to define what human rights are and what they encompass. As such, the UDHR is **highly relevant to each and every global citizen**, regardless of age and place of living.

The drafting and adoption of the UDHR was the **result of the harrowing experience of the Second World War**. World leaders decided to complement the UN Charter with a road map to guarantee the rights of every individual everywhere. The document they considered, and which would later become the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was taken up at the first session of the General Assembly in 1946.

The Assembly reviewed this draft Declaration on Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms and transmitted it to the Economic and Social Council "for reference to the Commission on Human Rights for consideration . . . in its preparation of an international bill of rights." The Commission, at its first session early in 1947, authorized its members to formulate what it termed "a preliminary draft International Bill of Human Rights". Later the work was taken over by a formal drafting committee, consisting of members of the Commission from eight States, selected with due regard for geographical distribution.

The Commission on Human Rights was made up of 18 members from various political, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, chaired the UDHR drafting committee. With her were René Cassin of France, who composed the first draft of the Declaration, the Committee Rapporteur Charles Malik of Lebanon, Vice-Chairman Peng Chung Chang of China, and John Humphrey of Canada, Director of the UN's Human Rights Division, who prepared the Declaration's blueprint. But **Mrs. Roosevelt was recognized as the driving force for the Declaration's adoption.**

Despite its universality and importance for the modern history of human rights and the struggle to make the world a better, more just place, the UDHR can pose a challenge from an educational perspective, since its language can be dense, obscure, and legalized.

This lesson plan is designed to help students understand the UDHR and its various applications to their daily lives and the world around them. It is devised to **turn human rights in the mind of students from an abstract concept into concrete experiences** that the students can identify and name. The lesson takes inspiration from these Eleanor Roosevelt's seminal words:

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home [...] 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 seek equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.

(Eleanor Roosevelt, 1958)

A Suggested Lesson Plan

Subject

Modern History; Social Studies

Grade Level

K-4; 5-8

Keywords

United Nations; UDHR; Human Rights; Eleanor Roosevelt

Under the main organizing idea of “Human Rights - Close to Home”, the lesson plan offers two tracks, one that is aimed at students at the elementary school level (grades k-4), and one that is aimed at students at the middle school level (grades 5-8). The lesson plan can be delivered in an in-person or remote setting.

The lesson plan is comprised of two parts, that can be delivered in one 90-min class, or two 45-min. classes. The first part, *Understanding the UDHR*, introduces the students to the Declaration and offers them an opportunity to engage with specific rights (that correspond to articles in the UDHR). The second part, *Everyday Human Rights*, allows students to explore and analyze the place of human rights in their daily lives, in a hands-on way and through the lens of Roosevelt’s concept of “close to home”

Goals

Students will understand and be able to explain what are universal human rights and what is the UDHR.

Students will gain awareness and analyze the relevance of the framework of human rights to their and others’ everyday life.

Key Questions

How are human rights manifested in our everyday lives?

What is the role of the UN in establishing a universal standard of human rights?

Process

Part I: Understanding the UDHR

K-4

Read aloud the opening pages of the Adaptation for Children of the UDHR by Ruth Rocha and Otavio Roth (pp. 1-8, see appendix) or have the students read them in turns.

Ask the students to define human rights, and discuss their answers. Ask guiding questions, like: does having human rights mean I can do as I please? Is [eating ice cream whenever I feel like it/not doing homework/going to bed when I wish/ always say what I think] a human right?

Divide the class into pairs. Give each pair one of the rights that are included in the adaptation (notice: the adaptation does not fully follow the format of the UDHR).

Ask the students to explain the right in their own words, and to think of at least 3 examples of how the right is manifested/can be withheld in the context of everyday life.

Have the pairs share their work with the class.

5-8

Explain the background and the origins on the UDHR (find more background information here: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/udhr/history-of-the-declaration>), and/or watch the UDHR @ 70 video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaHwy5tdLOY>

Divide the class into pairs. Give each pair one of the 30 articles of the declaration.

Have **the students** paraphrase the right in their own words and give it a title.

Ask the students to come up with at least 3 examples of how the right is manifested/ can be withheld in the context of everyday life.

Have the **students** share their work with the class.

Part II: Everyday Human Rights

K-4

Ask the students to describe their daily routines (getting up in the morning, brushing their teeth, eating breakfast, going to school, etc.), from waking up to

5-8

Take a look at the map of the neighborhood/town. Ask the students to identify spaces and locations where rights are

going to sleep. Include special days and activities like weekend, vacation, holidays, etc.

Using the name for the rights, ask the class to match between the activity and the right it reflects.

being granted or withheld. Create a “Human right map”.

You can also end with a discussion of whether or not the students think that their lives include granting of human rights according to the UDHR. Where do they feel that the social and political institutions (family, school, community, municipality, state, country) accomplish the UDHR? Where do they lack?

