



United Nations
Visitors Services
New York

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights



Teaching Guide and Resources

Historical Background

- 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.
- The harrowing experience of WWII influenced the decision to create the UDHR. World leaders felt the need to devise a road map guaranteeing the rights of all individuals everywhere.
- The document which they drafted was taken up at the first session of the General Assembly in 1946 and became the UDHR.



A Suggested Lesson Plan

Subject

- History; Social Studies; English

Keywords

- United Nations; UDHR; Human Rights; Eleanor Roosevelt

Goals

- Students will gain an understanding of the UDHR and the principles of universal human rights.
- In learning about how human rights relate to their lives, and the lives of others around the world, students will be inspired to integrate these values into their own communities and daily experiences.



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Overview

- This teaching guide is designed to help students understand the UDHR and how it applies to their daily lives and to the world around them. Given that it is written using legal terminology, it can be challenging for students to grasp its meaning. The teaching guide seeks to take abstract human rights concepts and to use examples to describe them, so that students can conceptualize these issues.
- The teaching guide takes inspiration from Eleanor Roosevelt:

“Where, after all, do universal human 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 seek 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

Understanding the UDHR

Younger Students (K-5)

Read aloud the opening pages of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: An Adaptation for Children* by Ruth Rocha and Otavio Roth, or have the students take turns.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: An Adaptation for Children by Ruth Rocha and Otavio Roth ([View UN Publication](#))

Older Students (6-12)

Explain the background and origin of the UDHR.

More information:

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/udhr/history-of-the-declaration>

Watch a video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATu9Pnq5838>

For information on the 75th Anniversary of the UDHR:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/get-involved/campaign/udhr-75#:~:text=It%20enshrines%20the%20rights%20of,celebration%20called%20Human%20Rights%2075>.

-Ask students what human rights mean to them.

-Ask students to define a right and describe what rights are universal.

Everyday Human Rights

Younger Students (K-5)

Activity 1: Ask the students to describe their daily routines from waking up to going to sleep.

How do students' activities relate to the rights which are guaranteed in the UDHR (for example, right to clean water, food, education, etc.)?

Activity 2: Divide the class into pairs. Give them one of the rights that are included in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: An Adaptation for Children*.

Ask the students to explain that right in their own words, and to think of at least 3 examples of how that particular right does or does not exist in their daily lives or in the lives of people in other countries.

Older Students (6-12)

Activity 1: Give students one of the 30 articles of the UDHR and assign them an article to interpret.

Ask the students to think of examples of how that particular article relates to their daily lives. Do they have these rights? Students should think about the lives of those in other countries; do they also have these rights?

Activity 2: Ask students to identify places in their community, country and around the world where rights are being granted or withheld.

Engage the students in a discussion on where they feel that the social and political institutions (family, school, community, etc.) achieve the aims of the UDHR, and where they feel that they are lacking.