

# GET STARTED IN HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Source: Human Rights Educators USA (2018). <https://hreusa.org/hre-library/get-started-hre/>

*“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 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, “In Our Hands” (1958 speech delivered on the tenth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

## INTRODUCTION

Suppose you want to teach a lesson or workshop on human rights. What would you teach? How would you teach it? Where would you find the resources to help you get started? On any given day a teacher touches upon human rights every day in class, explicitly or implicitly. In Government, US History, World History, Geography, Economics, Civics classes when covering globalization, the environment, peace, citizenship, gender equality, democracy, poverty, and intercultural relations which all address human rights issues. In Math using fractions to calculate poverty or literacy; in Science when studying the spread of viruses; in Languages by reading fiction, non-fiction, and diaries of victims and offenders of human rights. At lunchtime, on the playground and in class where equality, dignity, and respect are promoted as part of the school culture. Almost every challenge in the world today, in your community, at school – poverty, pollution, climate change, economic inequality, AIDS, poor access to education, racism, bullying, wars, etc. – involves human rights in some way.

Human rights are universal, inalienable, and indivisible. You have them; you don't need to earn them. Government has the duty or obligation to respect your rights and vice versa. When government fails to act, the international community has the duty or obligation to intervene or assist. Individuals do right by respecting each other's rights. Human rights apply regardless of gender, race, class, income, citizenship, physical or mental capabilities, age, or any combination of these characteristics. Since the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, where an internationally agreed upon set of standards was adopted, the list of human rights has steadily grown. Various

factors affect which specific rights citizens support and which human rights they want their government to protect.

## WHAT TO TEACH

Given that most any subject in school and issue in the community, national and international sphere, can be approached from a human rights perspective, here are some questions to help you make appropriate choices (this list assumes the educator already knows the grade level or audience):

- Will I be teaching a stand-alone lesson or will it be part of a larger unit?
- How much time do I want to (can I) devote to the lesson?
- How much preparation will I need to do, and how much preparation time do I have?
- How much prior knowledge is required of my students (or audience)?
- Which resources will I need?
- Will I be covering a specific human rights issue like Genocide or Health or the Environment, or will I start with a general introduction to human rights?
- Do I want to teach a controversial topic? If so, I must make sure I have created a safe environment.
- Do I want to work with a particular human rights document such as the Universal Declaration (UDHR) or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) or the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)?
- Do I want to make direct connections to required content or meet specific standards with this lesson?
- Do I want to address a particular problem in school such as bullying?
- Do I want to address a community issue such as unfair housing practices or wage discrimination or lack of resources for the elderly or improper curb cuts for those travelling in wheelchairs?
- Do I want to cover a national issue such as analyzing and comparing candidates in an upcoming election where what the candidates say about human rights issues? Use the list of topics on the website?
- Do I want to cover an international issue such as a humanitarian crisis and how my country and other countries should respond, if at all?

## HOW TO TEACH

Common principles inform the methods for effectively teaching and learning human rights. These include using participatory methods for learning such as role plays, discussion, debates, mock trials, games, and simulations. Once you have determined the content of your lesson or unit, take a look at the lesson plans we have provided on that topic in the [HRE USA Digital Library](#) to help you with ideas on the different approaches available.

## **A NOTE ON MAKING CONNECTIONS**

It is particularly important to bring human rights home to one's community and help students translate their concerns into value-based actions. The following questions can help to frame instruction linked to any human rights topic.

1. How does this topic manifest itself in your school, community, nation, and around the world?
2. What links can you make between this topic and human rights principles found in my country's constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), or other international rights documents?
3. What are the different experiences, values, and perspectives that people hold with respect to this rights-related topic?
4. Does everybody have a fair chance to exercise this right? Consider the following characteristics: race, class, gender, ethnicity, age, physical appearance, nationality/immigration status, disability, sexual orientation.
  - With these groups, who have been more successful at achieving this right? Who have been less successful at doing so?
  - What are some of the explanations for these unequal conditions?
5. How successful have we been in achieving the human rights standards found in the UDHR in your community, nation, and around the world? What reasons can you offer to explain the level of achievement?
6. Who are people and/or organizations in your community, country, or around the globe who work to address particular human rights problems?

## **CURRICULUM MATERIALS AND LESSON PLANS**

The [HRE USA Digital Library](#) provides a wide variety of teaching resources for a wide range of human rights topics. These include lesson plans, books, films, and more.

### **[The Human Rights Education Handbook: Effective Practices for Learning, Action, and Change](#)**

*Source: The Human Rights Resource Center and the Stanley Foundation*

This manual lays out the basics: why, for whom, what, where, who, and how. It draws on the experience of many educators and organizations, illustrating their effective practices and distilling their accumulated insights. It is intended to help people who care about human rights to become effective educators, able to share both their passion and their knowledge.

### **[Getting Started: Steps to becoming a human rights educator](#)**

*Source: The Advocates for Human Rights*

The Advocates for Human Rights created this edition of Rights Sites News as a primer

for all teachers interested in getting started as a human rights educator. Also check out their online [manual](#) on human rights education.

### **[Compasito: Manual on Human Rights Education for Children](#)**

*Source: Council of Europe*

A collection of activities designed for educators and trainers working with children, teachers, caretakers and parents as well, especially those who are interested in human rights education with children and who are looking for practical tools to discuss values and social issues with children. The activities are designed for children from six to thirteen years. The activities organized around thirteen selected themes: Citizenship, Democracy, Discrimination, Education and leisure, Environment, Family and alternative care, Gender equality, Health and welfare, Media and Internet, Participation, Peace and conflict, Poverty and social exclusion, Violence. In order to bring human rights issues closer to everyday reality and children's personal experiences, these themes focus broadly on values and social issues rather than on formal rights as laid down in conventions. Some themes also address issues that are relevant but seldom elaborated in other manuals, such as Education, Health, or Gender Equality. In addition to these selected themes, a category of general human rights was also introduced to provide children with an understanding of the concept of rights and how to adapt and apply them in their daily context.

### **[Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People](#)**

*Source: Council of Europe*

The central aim of this publication is to make human rights education accessible, usable and useful to educators, facilitators, leaders, teachers, volunteers and trainers who are active in educational activities with young people. It is, in many ways, a modest (yet ambitious) answer to the question that many concerned activists and educators pose: "HOW do we do it?" This manual and its activities can be used at school in a classroom or in extra-curricular activities, in a training course or a seminar, at a summer camp or in a work camp or in a youth club or with a youth group. They can also be used even if you work mostly with adults. The manual covers 15 themes: Children, Citizenship, Democracy, Discrimination and Xenophobia, Education, Environment, Gender Equality, Globalization, Health, Human Security, Media, Peace and Violence, Poverty, Social Rights and Sport.

### **[First Steps – A Manual for Starting Human Rights Education](#)**

*Source: Amnesty International*

This manual is for teachers and others who work with young people and who want to introduce human rights in their educational practices. It is designed to be a basic introduction, with age-specific activities for younger and older children. There is also advice on methodology, and help for those who want to go further into this subject. The approach stresses the practical rather than theoretical.

### **ABC: Teaching Human Rights – Practical activities for primary and secondary schools**

*Source: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*

ABC: Teaching Human Rights aims to serve as a user-friendly tool for human rights education and a multi-colored umbrella covering a number of basic human rights areas. It offers practical advice to teachers and other educators who want to foster human rights awareness and action among primary and secondary school children, including suggestions for developing learning activities. It is not meant to place an extra burden on an already overloaded curriculum but to assist in infusing human rights issues into subjects already taught in schools.

### **HRE Curriculum Integration Guide**

*Source: HRE USA*

This guide provides model lessons to help social studies and other educators implement human rights in their curriculum. Each lesson is tied to Common Core curriculum standards and contains suggested modifications for second language populations and classified students, as well as suggestions regarding how each lesson supports literacy development.