

Human Rights Activities: “Where Do You Stand?” and “Never Again”

“Where Do You Stand?” is adapted from *Understand the Law*, Part I: The Individual and Society,

SCDC Publications/The Law Society, (Published by Edward Arnold, 1988); further developed by Mike Pasternak and by Susan Patterson, who introduced it at the International Festival of Tolerance, Terezin, Czech Republic, 1998-2000.

“Never Again” is adapted from the “April Boycott” activity developed by Jacqueline Giere, Fritz Bauer Institut, Frankfurt, Germany, and further developed for the Tolerance Seminar, Kassel, Germany, 1996, by Auggie Zemo, Bev Meyer Zemo, & Mike Pasternak, Association for the Advancement of Education for Democracy (AED), Switzerland.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will be

- introduced to the subject of human rights
- move towards an understanding of the nature and extent of human rights
- understand the meaning of the term “human rights”
- introduced to the UDHR and other human rights documents and to some of the Nuremberg Laws

Students will practice skills of

- listening & responding to the views of others
- negotiating
- consensus building
- drafting (using human rights language)

Suggested Grade Level: Age 15 and up

Duration: 1-2 hours for each activity, depending on level of student discussion and involvement. (It is possible to extend or eliminate some stages of the activities, depending on the amount of time available, the level of maturity and sophistication of the students, and the teacher’s goals for the lesson or lessons.)

Connection to Facing History Scope & Sequence: Rise of the Nazis/The Nazis in Power, Judgment, Memory, & Legacy, Choosing to Participate

Historical Context:

After the horrors of World War II it was felt in many countries that an international charter on *human rights*¹ would reduce the chances that such atrocities would be repeated. As a result, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights was established and by 1948, a Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) had been drawn up. The UDHR is an important document for curbing unjust behavior by governments.

Though the Declaration itself is not legally enforceable, the International Conventions that emanate from it (e.g., the International Convention on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights) and are ratified by individual countries are expected to be incorporated into appropriate national legislation which is, then, enforceable; in addition, countries that are signatories to such conventions are expected to submit reports on their national compliance to the appropriate UN body. “Watchdog” organizations also help to monitor compliance.

The word **rights** is used in a number of different contexts to include **legal**, **moral**, and **human** rights. Those rights which are thought to have universal application are known as **human rights**.

Legal rights are laid down by law. Some countries (such as the U.S.) have a Bill of Rights. In others, such rights are written into their Constitutions. In still others (such as the UK), legal rights are not written down in either a Constitution or a Bill of Rights; instead, it is assumed that a person has the right to do something until a ruling to the contrary has been made by a court or by Parliament.

Moral rights is often taken to mean rights which are not enshrined in any formal code but which nonetheless are held to be reasonable; examples might be the right to privacy or the right to confidentiality.

It is recognized that human rights are not realized in some cases because of other interests of the state. Rationales invoked to limit human rights include:

- national security
- the economic well-being of a country
- public health and morals
- the preservation of law and order
- the need to respect the rights of others

In view of these exceptions it becomes harder to define a list of human rights that should always apply, whatever the circumstances.

¹ Although the concept of human rights goes back to Greek and Roman times (Stoics, *jus gentium* [which actually promoted slavery], English Bill of Rights [1689], and Locke’s “Rights of Man” and the American Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen [August 26, 1789], proclaiming that “men are born and remain free and equal in rights” and that “the aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man”), the phrase **HUMAN rights** dates from World War II.

Activity #1: Where Do You Stand?

Materials:

- A set of **Decision Cards** for each group of 3 to 5 players. (Decision Card statements are listed below.)
- A **game board**, drawn on a large sheet of **heavy paper, poster board, or construction [sugar] paper** - ca. 42 cm X 60 cm/ca. 18" X 24". The game board contains three concentric rectangles:
 - the rectangle in the center of the board is marked: **IN EVERY CASE**
 - the second rectangle (moving outward) is marked: **IN MOST CASES**
 - the third rectangle is marked: **IN SOME CASES**.
- A **sheet of paper** (ca. A3/11" X 17" or larger) for each group and **markers for groups** to record their lists of rights
- **Individual notebooks or journals** (to record reflections following the activity)

Decision Card statements:

1. Killing is wrong.
2. It is wrong to keep someone else as a slave.
3. After a certain age, people should be able to marry whomever they choose.
4. People should be allowed to say or write what they wish.
5. All people should be treated equally. It should not depend on such things as their gender, appearance, or the country they come from.
6. People in prison should be told why they are being held.
7. People should be allowed to criticize the government.
8. People should be allowed to talk to and meet anyone they wish.
9. It is wrong to force a person to work.
10. A person accused of a crime should be tried by someone who has nothing to do with the case.
11. People should be allowed to travel and leave their country if they wish.
12. Private letters and telephone calls should not be intercepted.
13. People should be allowed to have, or not have, whatever religious beliefs they wish.
14. All people have a right to belong to a country.
15. All people have the right to medical help if they are ill.
16. All people have a right to education. Parents have the right to choose the kind of education to be given to their children.

Playing the Game:

Step 1: Give each group of 3 to 5 players a set of cards. [Note: An odd number of players makes it somewhat easier to reach consensus.] One person in the group should deal out all the cards. It doesn't matter if some people get more cards than others.

Step 2: Without talking to anyone else, each person reads through his cards and places each one **face up**, where he thinks it should go on the board. For example, if one of the cards says: **Torture is wrong**, and the person thinks that torture is wrong **in every case**, he should place the card face up in the center rectangle. If he feels it is wrong **in most cases**, he places the card in the middle rectangle. If he thinks it is wrong only **in some cases**, he places it in the outermost rectangle.

Step 3: When everyone in the group has decided where to place his/her cards on the board, **still without talking**, everyone looks carefully at the cards that have been placed on the board by the other members of the group. If a player feels that a card has been placed in the wrong section, he turns it over so that it is now face down on the board.

Step 4: When everyone has had a chance to consider each of the cards on the board, the cards that have **not** been turned over are those on which the group agrees.

Step 5: Each group now looks together at each of the cards which is face down. The group's job now is to reach **consensus** (a group decision) on where each of these cards should go. (In each case the group might want to find out who put the card in this section of the board and who turned it over.)

Step 6: The cards in the center of the board describe rights which all believe should apply to everyone – no matter who they are, regardless of age, gender, religion, etc. – in all circumstances. These comprise the group's list of **human rights**. On the large sheet of paper provided, each group should use the markers to make a list of these rights.

Step 7 (can be omitted if time is short or can follow Step 9 instead): Each group now designates a representative who moves to another group to join in the discussion. Groups that have finished their negotiations early can exchange representatives and continue the discussion. (If sufficient time is available, this step can be used with all the groups.)

Step 8: Each group should now share its revised list with the other groups. The game can end here or move on to Step 9; if Step 9 is included, wait to share lists until after Step 9 is completed.

Step 9: The group now looks at the cards in the other two sections of the board ("in most cases" and "in some cases") and examines the language of these cards, looking for ways to re-write the language in such a way that these cards too can be moved to the center section ("in every case"). If such language can be found and consensus reached to move the cards, these statements are also added to the list of human rights.

Step 10: After the groups have shared their lists, the UDHR (in its simplified version) is introduced. Students can now compare their rights with those articulated in the UDHR.

Variation #1: Compare lists with another human rights instrument, such as the European Convention on Human Rights or the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Variation #2: Play “*Where Do You Stand?*” again, this time looking at the presence of human rights in school. The procedure for playing the game is the same, but the set of cards this time would contain appropriate statements about the organization and administration of a school.

Extending this activity:

At the International Festival of Tolerance, which takes place in the former Nazi concentration camp in Terezin (Czech Republic), we follow “Where Do You Stand?” with the question: Which of the rights on your list were violated here in Terezin? Students have, by this time, considerable knowledge of Terezin: They have heard the story of a Terezin survivor; they have seen exhibits that explore conditions in the camp and the artistic activities (art, music, theatre, and writing) of the prisoners there; and they have had a tour of the Terezin Ghetto, with historical background on the camp.

For those using this activity in a classroom, “Where Do You Stand?” can be followed by an examination of some of the Nuremberg Laws in the following activity: “Never Again.”