

# Commemorate Canada - Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## Overview

Students will learn about the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights by coming up with their own declaration of human rights.

## Time required

75 minutes

## Grades

7-12

## Subjects

Human Rights, Geography, History

## Learning goals

Students will:

- Understand the importance of universal human rights.
- Reflect on what humans need to feel safe, happy, and free.
- Draft a class version of a declaration of human rights.

## Materials

- Paper
- Writing utensils
- Projector or SMARTboard
- Chartpaper and markers

## Lesson implementation

### Minds on

**Note:** This lesson contains subject matter (human rights) which some students may find distressing. Closely monitor students' reactions and encourage students to approach you if they feel uncomfortable or need reassurance. Offer breaks as needed.

Explain that students will be learning about the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Ask students how they would define a human right and if they know of any examples. Explain that a right is something to which people are entitled. Human rights are rights and freedoms that all human beings are entitled to just by being human. These rights are considered essential for all people, regardless of where they live, what they look like, what they believe, or how much money they have. Human rights are like a set of rules that are meant to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and with respect.

In Canada, we have the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#), but did students know there are also universal human rights? These are laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a United Nations document drafted in 1948 by Canadian John Peters Humphrey, who worked closely with the former first lady of the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt.

To give students a brief overview of this important document, play the *Canadian Geographic* GeoMinute "[The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)."

### Action

Today, students will have the opportunity to work as a class and draft their own universal declaration of human rights before reading the United Nations' declaration. To help students get started, write the following questions on the board and ask students to reflect on them, writing down any thoughts that come up.

- What do humans need to live a happy life?
- What do humans need to feel safe?
- How should we treat other people?
- If someone breaks a law, how should they be treated?
- What do humans need to feel free?

You can also have a short discussion about past or current events and how human rights have been/are violated. Note that this is a sensitive subject and should be undertaken with students' backgrounds and level of understanding in mind.

Divide students into small groups. These groups will be "committees" that will be in charge of coming up with a declaration (a list) of universal human rights, rights they believe all humans — no matter their country, their income, their sex, their orientation, etc. — are entitled to have. Ask students to think about the questions posed a few minutes ago and discuss as a group what universal rights they believe humans have. Students should write down all of the human rights they feel are essential; there is no limit to the amount. Remind students the difference between rights and privileges. While it would be nice to have cake for dinner every night, it is not a human right. However, everyone has the **right** to not go hungry.

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## Connection to the Canadian Geography Learning Framework

### Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective

### Inquiry Process

- Formulate questions
- Gather and organize
- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate

Once students are happy with their declaration of human rights, their “committee” will present their rights to the class and make a case for why those rights should be included in the declaration. The audience can ask questions or for more information. Once all groups have completed their presentations, the class must now combine the declarations to create a single universal declaration as a class. Were there any rights that overlapped that could be combined into one? Were there any rights which the class decided were not appropriate?

Explain that a global human rights document does exist — the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document has 30 articles laying out fundamental values agreed upon by countries around the globe. These articles are not legally binding; however, they have been used to help build other human rights instruments (i.e., documents), national constitutions, international human rights laws, and other international agreements.

Project for students the UN Declaration of Human Rights. [This version](#) from Compasito and [this version](#) from Manitoba’s Education and Early Childhood Learning department are written in simpler terms that students will better understand.

How many of the rights did students include in their own declaration? Are there any more they would like to add to their own declaration? Are there any human rights they came up with that they feel should be added to the United Nations’ declaration?

Once students have finalized their universal declaration of human rights as a class, write out the declaration on a piece of chart paper to be displayed in the classroom.

### Conclusion and consolidation

Project the following quote from former first lady of the United States Eleanor Roosevelt for students to see.

“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 neighbourhood 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 concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world”.

Have students complete the writing prompt, “To me, the last sentence of this quote means \_\_\_\_\_.”

### Extend your geographical thinking

- Host a [Model United Nations simulation](#) in your classroom or school.
- Introduce students to the UN’s [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) and have them make connections between the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights and the SDGs.

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## Modifications

- This whole activity can be completed as a class.
- Teachers can limit the amount of human rights each group needs to develop.
- Teachers can name a few human rights at the beginning of the lesson to help students get started.
- Teachers can set a limit to how many articles can be included in the classroom declaration of human rights and host a debate for students to decide which articles will be included.

## Assessment opportunities

- Teachers can make observational assessments during student discussions.
- Teachers can use the classroom declaration of human rights to inform their next steps in teaching.

## Additional resources

- [Canadian Museum for Human Rights](#)
- [Youth for Human Rights](#)
- [United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(Child friendly version\)](#)
- [Manitoba Education: Human Rights - Universal Declaration of Human Rights Plain Language Version](#)
- [Canadian Geographic "In the Name of Humanity: Recognising 75 years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights"](#)
- [Canadian Geographic GeoMinute "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights."](#)