



Australian  
Human Rights  
Commission

everyone, everywhere, everyday

rightsED

Human rights  
education resources  
for teachers



Photo: Arthur Roy

# Commemorate Human Rights Day

# Commemorate Human Rights Day: 10 December



Human rights education resources for teachers

**Subjects:** Civics and Citizenship, Society and Environment (all), Design and Technology, English, Legal Studies, International Studies

**Level:** Year 9 and up (14 years and up)

**Time needed:** 1–4 lessons

## Introduction

December 10 is the anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations (UN) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR sets out a certain set of rights that are the basic and minimum set of human rights for all citizens.

Setting aside a day to commemorate, educate and reflect on the principles that form the UDHR means celebrating the rights we exercise everyday as Australians, and acknowledging that enjoying those rights carries with it the responsibility of promoting these rights for all people.

Things that many of us take for granted – such as the right to an education, the right to receive medical care, and the freedom to practice our chosen religion – are not equally available to all Australians and people in other parts of the world.

Many individuals and communities will be commemorating and celebrating December 10, and pledging a commitment to maintain and improve people's human rights wherever possible.

## Aim

The resources are designed to provide a brief and interesting introduction to the topic of human rights.

They can be photocopied for class use and used individually or as an entire resource.

## Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- identify the origins of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- develop an understanding of their own rights and responsibilities
- apply their own understanding of rights to the work and lives of others.

## Activities/resources

- Resource sheet: Where did the Universal Declaration of Human Rights come from?
- Activity sheet: Where did the Universal Declaration of Human Rights come from?
- Activity sheet: What does the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognise?
- Activity sheet: How have international human rights developed?
- Activity sheet: Human rights scenarios
- Resource sheet: How can you commemorate human rights day in your school?

## Teaching strategies

Each of the resource sheets and activities has been designed so that it can be used either as an individual lesson, or as part of a series. The final resource sheets provide students with ideas for further projects on the topic of human rights.

Note that more detailed information about human rights laws can be found using:

- Human Rights Explained Fact Sheets
- Lets talk about rights toolkit

# Where did the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) come from?

## Resource sheet

The 1948 UDHR came out of 1939-1945 (World War II).

Before the start of the war there were a number of countries, particularly Germany and Japan, which were dictatorships – countries in which the people had no say over the government. Those governments were both expansionist – that is, they wanted to expand their own territories by taking over other countries by force – and they were both ruthless in their treatment of those who disagreed with them.

In 1939, Germany's policy of seizing other countries led to war. Japan became involved in 1941.

During the war there were millions of soldiers and civilians killed or maimed. The Nazi Party that ran the government of Germany created concentration and extermination camps for certain groups – communists, gypsies, Jews, homosexuals and political opponents. Some were used as slave labour under appalling conditions. Many were simply killed in mass executions, by shooting or poison gas. Millions more died either from starvation, disease or brutal beatings.

The Japanese military government were equally brutal to its opponents. Japanese troops tortured and executed millions of the inhabitants of the countries they seized to 'liberate' from the European colonial powers. They also took hundreds of thousands of captured troops, including thousands of Australian soldiers, and worked them as slave labour, with no medical treatment and inadequate food. Many men and women died in agony under these conditions.

The war ended in 1945 only after the destruction of millions of homes and lives by fighting and bombing, including the use of atomic weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan.

Countries were left devastated. Millions of people became homeless refugees. There was civil war and revolution in many of the countries which had been freed from rule by European colonial governments, but which had not been prepared for self-rule by their colonial masters.

Shock followed the end of World War II. During the war crimes trials in Nuremburg, many of the German and Japanese leaders claimed justification for their brutal actions with the defence that they were only acting under orders. The world demanded that people accept responsibility for their own actions, regardless of their rank.

In 1945, the United Nations was created, with a dream of securing peace and justice in the world by international co-operation. Part of the Charter of the UN – Article 55 – called for the establishment of a set of universally accepted and observed basic human rights, so that people would never again have to go through the abuses that they had just suffered.

By 1948, those nations of the world who were part of the UN adopted a document that would set out for the first time a set of fundamental human rights for everybody. They drew on great documents from the past that had set out people's rights – such as the United States Declaration of Independence (1776), and the French Revolution's Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789). But for the first time this would be an international document created and agreed to by the nations of the world and not just one nation's document. And so the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created.

# Where did the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) come from?

## Activity sheet

1. Using the resource sheet, list three different situations where human rights were being violated during the war years.

Situation	Human rights violation
1.	
2.	
3.	

2. How might public awareness and international acknowledgement of human rights have prevented these events from occurring?

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# What rights does the UDHR recognise?

## Activity sheet

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is made up of a Preamble, and 30 Articles.

### Read

Read the UDHR at <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

There are certain principles that were behind the creation of these 30 rights.

Some of these principles relate to civil and political rights which defend the fundamental right to life, and states that no one can be tortured, enslaved, arbitrarily imprisoned, made to do forced labour, or be restricted from such basic freedoms as movement, expression and association. Such principles are stated in negative terms such as 'freedom from' (discrimination, torture etc).

Other principles relate to economic, social and cultural rights, which assure people of their rights to basic standards of life. These rights are founded on a belief that we can enjoy our rights, freedoms and economic justice all at the same time. Economic, social and cultural rights are often stated in positive terms such as 'right to' (life, education etc).

### Class discussion

As a class, decide which articles apply to each of the following principles:

- a. Some of the rights are civil and political rights.

Which articles would fit this category?

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- b. Some of the rights are economic, social and cultural rights.

Which articles would fit this category?

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- c. Some of the rights are community obligations for the rights to be able to exist.

Which articles would fit this category?

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### Activity

The French-Jewish jurist, Renee Cassin, was one of the main authors of the Declaration. He described the structure of the UDHR in a different way to that above, he spoke of four pillars supporting a roof.

- 1. Decide which articles fit into the following categories:

- a. One pillar is personal rights – 'My right to be me'.

Which articles would fit this category?

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- b. A second pillar is rights that belong to the individual in his/her relationships with the social group – 'Don't interfere with us'.

Which articles would fit this category? .....



**c.** A third pillar is civil liberties and political rights – ‘I can help decide’.

Which articles would fit this category?

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**d.** A fourth pillar is rights exercised in the economic and social area – ‘I need care and work’.

Which articles would fit this category?

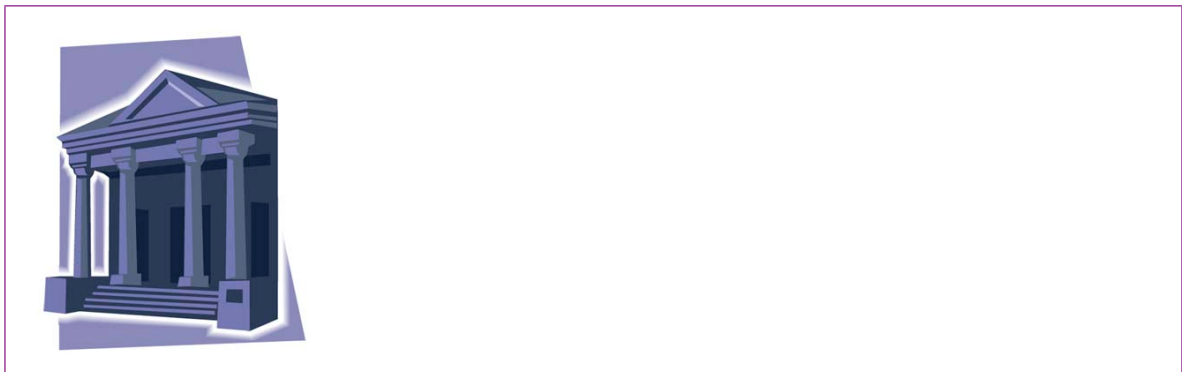
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**e.** The ‘roof’ that the pillars hold up and which in turn helps to keep the pillars standing is the right to a social and international order in which these can all be realised – ‘We all need a roof to hold together’.

Which articles would fit this category?

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**2.** Sketch your own human rights building below and write key words from the relevant UDHR articles in the various pillars. An example is shown.



When you have completed your sketch, form groups of three or four and discuss why you chose the articles to go in each category. Try and come to a final decision as a group.

### Extension activity

There are many other interesting ways the structure of the UDHR could be described and presented. Apart from the ‘four pillars supporting a roof’, how else could you describe the UDHR structure?

In pairs, decide on an alternate structure for the grouping of the UDHR. How would this structure best be represented (e.g. as a poster or a sculpture)?

Present your ideas to the class.

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# How have international human rights developed?

## Activity sheet

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is considered a useful starting point for research in international human rights law. Many other treaties and conventions have been agreed to since then. There have also been many human rights issues raised around the world.

### Research

Use your research skills to find out more about the history of international human rights from 1948 onwards. Identify 10 - 15 significant events.

Some places to start are:

- international human rights conventions
- awards and ceremonies that recognise human rights achievements
- key people that have lobbied for change
- changes to law and policy in Australia for the benefit of all.

The following list of links might be useful:

- Australian Human Rights Commission - <http://www.humanrights.gov.au>
- United Nations Cyberschoolbus - <http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/res.html>
- Amnesty International - <http://www.amnesty.org/>
- Human Rights Watch - <http://www.hrw.org/>
- Human Rights Internet - <http://www.hri.ca/>
- The Human Rights Council of Australia - <http://www.hrca.org.au/>
- Australian Human Rights Centre - <http://www.ahrcentre.org/>
- Universal Rights Network - <http://www.universalrights.net/>
- UN Information Centre of Australia - <http://www.un.org.au/>

### Create a timeline

Design a human rights timeline (either in your group or on your own). Consider the following design elements before you start:

- Spatially – how will you set out your timeline on the screen/page so it best conveys your information?
- Textually – how much textual information will you include? Try to summarise the information about each point of your timeline to convey the most important facts.
- Visually – how will you incorporate colour, pictures and other means of visual information? Have you got sample designs to guide you?

Be creative in your choice of media. As long as the important facts are there, your timeline could be presented as a:

- PowerPoint presentation
- web page
- photographic essay with captions
- play
- a piece of journalism
- artwork.



Be selective about the information you include in your timeline. For each event, one paragraph of information is generally enough.

## Class discussion

As a class, discuss what you've discovered about the history of international human rights. Make a case for the information you've discovered – explain why each event/development is important. Listen to your classmates' selections.

*Is there an event you left out?*

Make notes about major events/developments that you didn't include in your timeline that perhaps others did.

## Human rights in Australia

**Are some events more significant for certain groups of people? Are some events more significant in Australian history than others?**

Discuss the relevance of each idea to the development of human rights in Australia.

Add a 'layer' or 'thread' of events/developments relating to human rights in Australia to your timeline. Make it clear if they are directly or indirectly linked to international developments in your design. For example, Australia becoming a member of the UN in 1945 has a 'direct' link to our progress in human rights.

## Human rights heroes

*Collect a series of images for a display on human rights heroes.*

Every day different people work tirelessly to promote, protect and respect human rights. Every year the Australian Human Rights Commission recognise human rights advocates at the annual *Human Rights Medals and Awards* ceremony (see [www.humanrights.gov.au/awards](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/awards)).

Identify 10 images of human rights heroes that *you* think deserve to be on your display. Use the scaffold below to explain why each of your 10 should be nominated. (This could be presented using PowerPoint or on your own school wall display).

For definitions on human rights see [www.humanrights.gov.au/education](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education).

(insert image of person)	
Author (of photo/image)	
Person in image (human rights advocate)	
Context (when and where)	
Content (message in image)	
Justification (why you chose it)	

## Human rights image library

Collect a series of images for a display on the importance of protecting human rights.

Throughout history many photographers and artists have captured images that reflect various human rights issues. Identify 10 images that highlight the importance of protecting human rights in Australia.

Use the scaffold below to explain why each of your 10 has been chosen. (This could be presented using PowerPoint or on your own school wall display).

(insert image)	
Author (of photo/image)	
Title	
Context (when and where)	
Content (message in image)	
Justification (why you chose it)	

(insert image)	
Author (of photo/image)	
Title	
Context (when and where)	
Content (message in image)	
Justification (why you chose it)	

(insert image)	
Author (of photo/image)	
Title	
Context (when and where)	
Content (message in image)	
Justification (why you chose it)	

(insert image)	
Author (of photo/image)	
Title	
Context (when and where)	
Content (message in image)	
Justification (why you chose it)	

(insert image)	
Author (of photo/image)	
Title	
Context (when and where)	
Content (message in image)	
Justification (why you chose it)	

# Human rights scenarios

## Activity sheet

Every year on December 10, we commemorate the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. During 2009, the Australian Government conducted a series of human rights consultations on human rights in Australia.

The human rights consultation process has raised the following questions:

- Which human rights (including corresponding responsibilities) should be protected and promoted?
- Are these human rights currently sufficiently protected and promoted?
- How could Australia better protect and promote human rights?

In order to answer the questions above, read through the hypothetical scenarios below and discuss with a group/class how you might respond to the questions asked.

### 1. Young people and police custody

A 15 year old African Australian Islander girl is taken to the police station for questioning about a robbery. As she is being driven to the station the police ask her a lot of questions. She doesn't have a liaison officer, a legal advocate, a parent or an adult carer with her while she is being questioned. The girl does not know her rights.

Do you know your rights? Why, why not? Does the government have a role to play in this situation?

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### 2. Control of Centrelink money

The Government has concerns that Aboriginal people are spending their Centrelink money on the wrong things like alcohol and gambling and are worried that there is too much humbugging taking place in communities. As a result, the Government has decided to make sure that people receiving the Centrelink payment spend half their money on food and clothing. They have set up a system so the money can only be spent on these things. This rule only applies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It does not apply to non-Indigenous people.

What do you think about this? Why?

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### 3. Safety and police

A small remote community of 90 people has problems with fighting at night. Many people are frightened and don't know what to do when they are in danger. There are no police in the community and the Government says the community is too small to set up a police station.

What is your view? Should the Government take action? If yes, what action should they take? If not, why not?

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### 4. Drinking water

A remote community with a population of about 50 people has access to bore water but it is not good quality. The older people are getting sick with kidney problems because of the poor water quality.

Should the people move or should the government do something about it? Why?

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### 5. Children and safety

A five year old child is wandering around the streets, unsupervised by his mother or father. His parents spend a lot of time at the Casino at night and sleep in late in the mornings. The child is left alone until someone wakes up to get him food.

Does the Government have a role to assist the child and/or the family? What should the Government do in this situation?

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## 6. Keeping families together

A mother is expecting a baby but there is no hospital in her town of nearly 2,000 people. There is a health clinic but no hospital facilities. The hospital is a long way from the community and the only way to get there is by plane. Under the air transport and health department rules she must go to the hospital four weeks before the baby is due.

The father does not live at home with the children and there is no Government money to fly the children with their mother. The children do not want to be separated from their mother.

Should the Government do anything in this situation? Why or why not?

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## 7. Disability services

The health clinic in a regional town of Australia has three steps up to the front door. A number of local people have walking sticks and two people are in wheelchairs. Some people have to be carried up the stairs when they attend the health clinic. The clinic has hard wooden floors and when the children run around the waiting room there is a lot of noise. A number of community members have middle ear conditions and as a result they have hearing impediments. There have been complaints that the patients cannot hear the health workers and they have misunderstood important advice because of the noise problems at the clinic.

Does the Government have a responsibility to do something? Why or why not?

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# How can you commemorate International Human Rights Day at your school?

## Resource sheet

Human Rights Day, 10 December, marks the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

To help your school celebrate International Human Rights Day, here are some suggestions that you could consider taking to the person or group responsible for planning the occasion – or you could volunteer to be part of the group and help:

- **Publicise the UDHR** in the school and the community.
- **Have a human rights award** for people who have contributed to human rights in your school or community.
- **Create or take over part of a notice board** for human rights activities, news and issues.
- **Develop a multicultural charter** setting out some key principles that apply in your school and community.
- **Develop a human rights pledge** which all students and staff can be asked to recite on the day.
- **Invite human rights speakers** to your school.
- Prepare a 'what to see' list for forthcoming **film or television programs** which have a human rights interest.
- Support a **human rights project**.
- Create a list of **human rights web sites** (start with the Commission website at [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)), and use these to develop a trivia quiz on human rights for your school.
- **Contact a group** such as Amnesty International and consider setting up a school chapter of such a group.

Start thinking and planning now. Make 10 December a ceremony that really creates awareness of human rights issues, which inspires people to appreciate what they have, and to strive to make sure that all people enjoy human rights equally.