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| **Back**  |  | **Human Rights: Whose Rights are Right?** |
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| **Grade Level** |  | 9-12 |
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| **Introduction** |  | Human rights concern the relationship of people with their society. What rights and responsibilities does that society afford? What duties and obligations do people have? What duties and obligations does the society have? How does the society treat its people, and how do people within the society treat one another? If a nation denies its people basic freedoms, it is not likely to be concerned with the basic rights of peoples of other nations.Not all nations have documents to guarantee basic human rights. However, the idea that individuals ought to be afforded dignity and rights by virtue of their humanity is a universal one. To support that idea, international documents developed by the United Nations declare the universal rights of human beings. To ensure that people the world over are granted basic human rights, we must take steps to educate ourselves about these rights. The first challenge for teachers is to establish an atmosphere of tolerance, respect and solidarity. Teachers' attitudes toward their students set an example for the development of students' attitudes. An openness to discussion and to divergent opinions will facilitate this development. The struggle for human rights has been long and arduous. Some pinpoint its beginning with Hammurabi's Code in 1700 B.C., in which the concepts of law and justice were established. The attainment of human rights for all will be achieved only when each individual acknowledges the validity of these rights. Therefore, an understanding of human rights begins with the individual. Recognizing one's own basic human rights is the first step in the quest for achieving human rights for all. |
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| **Teacher/StudentObjective** |  | The class, the teacher and students together, will grapple with definitional aspects of "rights" guaranteed to all humans and generate a working list of such rights to form a base for judgment. These judgments will be used to compare and contrast rights as they exist in various global documentary sources, and to continue that discussion in reference to relevant historical and contemporaneous situations. |
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| **Gauging StudentUnderstanding** |  | The progress indicators cited reflect desirable end goals. Teachers should be prepared to use a wide variety of observational, testing and authentic achievement evaluation measures in judging the progress of students.Through the examination of current events newspaper articles that deal with the topic of, or issues related to, human rights, students will develop their own definitional base for judging what is and what is not a matter related to human rights, and reveal their ability to apply this standard by examining both historical and contemporaneous events. |
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| **Materials** |  | * Copies of the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution; the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and the Declaration of the Rights of Children.
* Copies of the following documents or sources should either be available for reference or put on reserve in the library:

Declaration of IndependenceThe Rights of Man (Paine)Common Sense (Paine)Summa Theologica (Aquinas)Code of HammurabiTen CommandmentsDeclaration of the Rights of ManEnglish Bill of RightsThe Spirit of Laws (Montesquieu)Das Kapital (Marx)The Social Contract (Rousseau)Code of JustinianK'ung Fu-tzu (Confucius) AnalectsMagna CartaMeng-tzu (Mencius)Mandate of HeavenThe Shari'ahThe UN Charter Writings of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, et. al.* Access to newspapers and periodicals should be provided. These should either be highlighted or already clipped for ease of distribution and use. The same use of newspapers should be made at the end to further check the students' understanding of human rights.
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| **Initial Data forConsiderationand/or Process** |  | In discussing a series of newspaper or periodical articles (some of which are purposefully designed not to illustrate human rights violations) previously selected by the teacher, students will single out examples of persons being persecuted or dehumanized and indicate why they believe that a human rights issue is involved.Given a listing of these instances of human rights (along with the other non-instances) and a free discussion of the differences between "human" rights and "other rights," the students will propose a working definition of human rights.Using the definition they have agreed upon, the students will generate (either individually or in small groups) a list of rights which they believe ALL humans should possess inherent to their humanity. This should be conducted in a brainstorming manner with no student assertion denied.After generating the list, students individually will compare their list with what they believe are the "rights" which they possess as (a) students; (b) adolescents; and (c) as future adults. By so doing, they will indicate the depth of their perceptions by identifying differences and similarities. By choosing the one right that they believe is the most significant and writing a short paragraph about it, they will reflect the intensity of the learning experience. The opportunity to share their own perceptions with the remainder of the class and to come up with a consensus on what they believe are the most important rights of humans will significantly indicate their understanding.By making direct associations from their consensus list to the first ten amendments to the US Constitution, students will demonstrate the realization that, either directly or through interpretation, many of the rights they identified are guaranteed to them as a adult citizens (and, by court decisions to children as well). Are there any rights on their list that they think should be included in the Bill of Rights? Should they add any rights to their list? |
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| **Other PossibleActivities** |  | Tell students that the member nations of the United Nations have also tried to list basic human rights. Distribute the readings on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Rights of the Child. Explain that member countries disagree whether these documents are legally binding on any nation, since they are embodied in a treaty–the UN Charter–which the member states ratified. They do, however, represent a model for human rights and fundamental freedoms that should be available to all people. Have students compare US Constitutional amendments to the Declaration of Human Rights to evaluate how their legal rights "stack up." Ask students to "match" articles from the Declaration of Human Rights to the amendments.You might also provide a copy of the Declaration of Independence as part of this exercise. If so, ask students if they recognize that Article I of the Declaration of Human Rights parallels the first statement from the Declaration of Independence ("We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."). Also discuss Article 21 of the Declaration of Human Rights. Note that both it and the Declaration of Independence insist that people have the right to govern themselves. Ask students if they want to make any further additions to the class list of human rights. At this juncture, you might point out that many of the rights contained in the amendments are concerned with voting and other political freedoms. This concern with political rights can be explained readily if students recall the period in which the Constitution was written. Today, many Third World and developing countries are more interested in economic rights, and this is reflected in the UN document. Ask students to discuss this. This difference in the way the most important human rights have been perceived has caused disagreement between Western nations, which traditionally have been interested in political rights, and Third World nations, which are sometimes more interested in economic rights. At the end of this activity, ask students if they feel the amendments adequately cover their human rights. Is each of the rights they have listed protected in some way in the US? How? Is it covered in the Constitution? Is it a local, state or federal law? Is it handled by social tradition?  |