

Story of Our Rights and Freedoms – Our Democratic Freedoms – Year 8 Civics

Teacher preparation

Overarching learning goal: Students will understand several democratic freedoms. They will be able to apply their understanding to their own experiences and the experiences of other people. Students will consider the implications of when democratic freedoms are not enjoyed, and be able to formulate questions around concepts that they have not yet grasped.



Teacher content information:

To safeguard rights and freedoms, many countries include protections for basic human rights in national law. While the Australian government has been a longstanding supporter of the United Nations and was involved in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), not all Australian legislation is entirely compatible with the Declaration. However, many of our rights and freedoms are protected by court judgements, Federal, State and local government laws, regulations and in the Federal and State Constitutions.

Australia is a representative democracy, meaning that citizens entrust the decisions about how they are governed to elected representatives. If a person's rights and freedoms are not being upheld, they have the power to vote for a different representative.

There is no universally accepted definition of human rights, and our understanding is continually developing. Some definitions include:

- The recognition and respect of peoples' dignity
- A set of moral and legal guidelines that promote and protect the recognition of our values, our identity and access to an adequate standard of living
- The basic standards by which we can identify and measure inequality and fairness
- Those rights associated with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

When we talk about human rights we usually refer to principles that have been agreed upon by countries throughout the world. These rights have been set down in international agreements and form part of international law. They can also be written into the domestic law of individual countries. Human rights cover virtually every area of human life and activity. These include:

- Civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom from torture
- Economic and social rights, such as the rights to health and education
- Individual rights, including the right to a fair trial
- Collective rights, or those rights that apply to groups of people, such as the right to a healthy environment or to live on one's ancestral land.

The UDHR is an international document that recognises the basic rights and fundamental freedoms to which all human beings are entitled. It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948 and marks a key milestone in the history of human rights. The Magna Carta, though limited in who it protected, was an important precursor to the UDHR.

[Click here to watch a video about the Magna Carta.](#)

You can view the entire text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the other core international human rights treaties, on the [United Nation's website](#) or by downloading [RightsApp](#) (free from the iTunes App store).

Additional resources:

- Factsheet: [What are Human Rights?](#)
- Factsheet: [About the Australian Human Rights Commission](#)
- Factsheet: [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- Factsheet: [The International Bill of Human Rights](#)
- Link: [Human Rights Explained: Index of factsheets](#)
- Factsheet: [Democracy](#)

Hot tip: Consider starting this lesson by establishing a mutually agreed list of class agreements, displaying them in a highly visible place, and encouraging the class to kindly remind each other of the agreements. Refer to the [Handling Sensitive Topics and Controversial Issues factsheet](#) for more information.

Teaching sequence

60 minutes – Part A: Exploring Our Freedoms

40 minutes – Part B: Circle of Viewpoints

20 minutes – Reflection

Work through this resource material in the following sequence:

PART A: Exploring Our Freedoms

Step 1. Explain that this activity involves finding out more about the freedoms that are part of a democratic society such as Australia. Start by attaching the [Freedoms Research Topic Posters](#) at even intervals on the classroom walls – they detail the freedoms protected in Australian society and provide guiding questions around each.

Step 2. Invite students to move around to read each of the cards, and to choose a freedom to research further into. Ask the class to distribute themselves into groups evenly among the different topics.

Step 3. Explain to students that they will work in groups to create a gallery walk that explores each of the freedoms in more detail. Students are prompted to find:

- An explanation of the freedom
- A symbol that represents the freedom. This can be in the form of an illustration, an image sourced online or elsewhere
- The article/s from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that are associated with the freedom (these could be paraphrased)

Students could create posters or a digital presentation for the gallery walk using Prezi, Adobe Spark (or similar) to be displayed on a device. They could refer to a printed version of [Universal Declaration of Human Rights articles](#) if required.

Step 4. Allow enough time for students to complete their research and gallery walk presentation.

Step 5. Invite students to move around the gallery to read other students' presentations.

Step 6. Once students have had a chance to read each other's findings, facilitate a quick class discussion and invite students to identify the piece of information they found most interesting.

Step 7. Invite students to reform their groups and to work together to think deeply about what our freedoms look like in real life. Remaining focused on the freedom they explored for the gallery walk, and using the ['What do Democratic Freedoms look like?' - stacked Venn diagram](#) to guide them, encourage students to conceptualise and describe examples of what freedom looks like at different levels in society.

Encourage students to describe specific actions that people can take and activities they can participate in because they have the freedom to do so. These could include protests, publicly voicing opinions about government decisions and equal access to services.

Hot tip: If students are feeling challenged, or don't have prior knowledge around the freedom, they could conduct some online research for some inspiration to help them to conceptualise the freedom.

Step 8. Encourage sets of two groups to join together to share their ideas in a quick discussion, then attach their diagrams to the wall under the gallery walk presentation.

PART B: Circle of Viewpoints

Step 1. This activity encourages students to further scrutinise rights and freedoms from a perspective other than their own. Write the list below on the whiteboard and ask students to choose one, ensuring that each of the perspectives is represented by at least one student (this list is also on the Student Worksheet):

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Recent migrants
- Women
- Older people
- Children and young people
- LGBTI people
- Prisoners
- People with disability
- People without citizenship

Then, invite students to complete the following sentence stems from the point of view they have selected:

- I am thinking of democratic rights and freedoms in Australia from the point of view of...

- In regards to democratic rights and freedoms, I think...
- A question I have about democratic rights and freedoms from this viewpoint is...

The sentence stems are provided on the Student Worksheet.

Step 2. Once students have completed the sentences, invite them to sit in discussion groups of four or five people. Encourage students to take turns reading what they have written.

Once each group member has had an opportunity to share, invite students to ask each other the following questions:

- What new thoughts do you have about the topic that you didn't have before?
- What new questions do you have?

Reflection

Encourage students to reflect on their new knowledge of freedoms, human rights and democracy through the '[Connect-Extend-Challenge' visible thinking routine](#) on the Student Worksheet. Ask students to respond to the following questions:

- How are your new ideas and/or perspectives about democratic freedoms connected to what you already knew?
- What extended or pushed your thinking in a new direction or directions?
- What is still challenging or confusing for you? What questions do you now have?

Once students have had time to formulate their ideas, invite volunteers to share their questions and challenges with the class and encourage students to offer thoughts and ideas to help resolve these challenges.

Differentiated Learning

Extension: Encourage students to research additional rights and freedoms or to find multiple examples of the freedom in action.

Provisional Learning Support: Group students with mixed abilities. If students have limited knowledge of examples of human rights in world events or history offer them the opportunity to find examples of human rights from television, movies or books.