Human rights and the work of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Lesson Ideas
December 2019
Introduction

The overall aim of this lesson idea is to raise awareness of human rights and to be an educational resource for use in a post primary setting in Northern Ireland. Use of the lesson ideas is at the discretion of the education provider.

It is important at the outset to prepare students to discuss sensitive or controversial issues. A safe and positive learning environment which enables students to participate with confidence can be empowering. Agree strategies to use to ensure respectful yet challenging discussions:

See sheffield.ac.uk/lets/toolkit/teaching/sensitive for more ideas and guidance on creating good learning environments for teaching about sensitive and controversial issues when dealing with mental health issues provide guidance on safety, confidentiality and where to get additional and professional help whilst following your schools guidance and policies relating to child protection.

Dates for your Diary

**World Press Freedom Day**
3rd May

**World Mental Health day**
10th October

**International Day for the Eradication of Poverty**
17th October

**International Day of Disabled Persons**
3rd December

**Human Rights Day**
10th December

**Northern Ireland Human Rights Festival**
2nd week in December

Some of your students may have personal experience of the issue under discussion and may find participation in these discussions difficult. Create a safe and positive environment. Agree strategies in advance. See notes on teaching sensitive issues.
Human Rights


Teachers’ Notes and Background Information

Human rights are the building blocks for a fair peaceful and inclusive society. UDHR calls for human rights to be promoted and protected. All the UN Conventions which form the basis of our laws recognise that in order to access rights, people must know about them, so raising awareness of human rights is a priority.

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world. Human rights can never be taken away, although they can sometimes be restricted - for example if a person breaks the law.

Human rights protect you in many areas of your day-to-day life, including:

- your right to have and express your own opinions
- your right to an education
- your right to a private and family life
- your right not to be mistreated

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission protects and promotes the rights of all those who live in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) is the National Human Rights Institution for Northern Ireland. Although funded by government, they are an independent public body whose job it is to make sure government and other public bodies protect the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland.

- The UK Government made a commitment to establish a Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in the Belfast Good Friday Agreement
- The NIHRC was set up in 1999 following the introduction of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- We were the first national human rights institution in the UK.
- The NIHRC’s powers are set out in legislation and its responsibilities as a national human rights institution are set out in the UN Paris Principles.
What we do

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission’s job is to make sure government and public bodies protect the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. We advocate that Northern Ireland should maintain the highest standard of human rights.

We also consider the policies and plans that government and other organisations develop, and tell them if we think there could be a problem and we try to help them improve it. We are experts in human rights law, we monitor international treaties and listen to discussions in places like the United Nations.

We promote awareness of human rights through education, training and research.

In its Annual Statement to Government each year the NIHRC raises issues relating the standard of human rights in Northern Ireland. We also report to the United Nations on how the UK Government is meeting its human rights obligations.
Teaching and learning

There are a number of things that should be considered when teaching or being taught about human rights

Teaching and learning about human rights should encompass;

• Learning about human rights, through the development of knowledge of what human rights are and how they impact on our lives. This includes knowledge and understanding of human rights principles, articles and documents, how they have been developed and where the responsibility lies for protecting them.

• Learning for human rights, by developing values consistent with human rights and giving skills to access and take action on human rights. Skills and dispositions such as;
  - Empathy / and the ability to take different perspectives
  - Good communication skills
  - Cooperation
  - Respect and responsibility
  - Conflict resolution
  - A sense of fairness / justice
  - Ability and desire to take action / empowerment

• Learning through human rights to ensure that young people learn in an environment fully respectful of their rights. Teaching and learning that is respectful of the child; their needs and abilities, is participatory / active; Takes into consideration different learning styles; Listens to children’s voices; Is empowering, creates a school environment that is respectful of the rights of the whole school community and acts as a model for children and young people.

For more information on human rights, principles and instruments

• UNOHCHR History and summary of UDHR https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=259&v=5RR4VXNX3jA

• https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhatAreHumanRights.aspx

• UNCRC https://www.niccy.org/children-and-young-people/your-rights/know-your-rights/

Aim

• To familiarise students with the work of the NIHRC and their role to respect, promote and protect the rights of people in Northern Ireland

Learning Intentions

Students will:

• Gain an understanding of the role and work of the NIHRC and understand that the Commission protects and promotes the rights of all those who live in NI.

• Explore human rights issues affecting people in Northern Ireland and how these are linked.
Activities

Activity One - Human Rights and the Universal Declaration
Watch the video outlining the background to the UDHR and explaining the role of the UN in monitoring. Video duration 3.34mins.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=41GB1Ng_G8Q

Activity Two - The work of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
Use the PowerPoint presentation 'What We Do NIHRC.ppt' giving the students the following quiz questions at the outset
• What are human rights?
• When did the Universal Declaration of Human Rights come in to play?
• What are the other key human rights documents?
• Who is the Chief Commissioner of Human Rights in Northern Ireland?
• What role does the Commission play in relation to human rights in Northern Ireland?
Answers are at the end of the PowerPoint.
Watch the video on the work of the NIHRC
www.youtube.com/watch?v=flu7GPT_gy4

Activity Three - Human Rights Walk
This activity has been attached separately

Activity Four - Human Rights and me
• We are all born free
• We all have our own thoughts and ideas
• We should all be treated in the same way
• These rights belong to everybody.
• They apply whatever our differences
Ask students to select one of the words below and write a short 200-500 words on what it means to them and why they feel it is important. Allow students time to share their thoughts and opinions.

Additional Activities
Promote and protect rights in your school.
• Invite the NIHRC to come to your school to talk about their work
• Create a display on human rights using the various articles or rights words above
• Prepare an assembly on human rights for the whole school
For more information about this lesson plan or any of our other lesson plans please see the contact details below.