

## The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and The Rights of the Child

*This lesson is adapted from the UNA Canada Website. The copies of the 'Simplified Version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' and the 'Conventions on the Rights of the Child' are taken from the 'Me to We' Educators Package*

### **The Pen Game**

#### **Purpose:**

To show how the rules or laws that are made without consulting all people lead to unfairness and injustice and breed cynical attitudes.

#### **Set Up:**

The group sits in a circle and are told they are going to play the Pen Game. Tell students the rules of the game will not be explained.

#### **The Game:**

Give a pen to one person and ask them to start the game by passing the pen to the next person in the circle.

After the pen is passed, announce that the passer has broken a rule, and say what the rule was. It can be any arbitrary thing. Ask the second person to continue by passing the pen to the next person.

Every so often, announce another broken rule; continue the game until the pen returns to the person who started.

The broken rules can be as simple as - passing the pen with the left hand, passing the pen with tip forward, passing the pen with the cap off, passing the pen without saying 'Bam!', passing the pen with their legs crossed, passing the pen to someone wearing a ring, passing the pen to someone wearing a green shirt, etc.

#### **The Discussion:**

What mistakes were made? What were the rules to the game? Do they accept their mistakes? Was the game fair? Who is to blame for the errors, the participants or the facilitator? What was wrong with the game? How should it be changed? How can the game be made fair and just?

Have you ever heard of human rights? Can you explain what they are?

Explain that human rights are those rights which are essential for us to live as human beings. Give some examples and pass out a copy of the 'Simplified Version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (UDHR). Explain that after World War II and the formation of the UN, a group of some 50 countries got together and agreed on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which lists the rights that every person has. John Peters Humphrey, a Canadian from New Brunswick, wrote the first draft of the Declaration, so Canada had an important role right from the start. The UDHR is not a law, it is a statement about what countries should do. However many countries, such as Canada, have made the UDHR part of their own laws. Canada has done this through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and the Canadian Human Rights Act.

There are also two international covenants (treaties) based on the Declaration which bind the countries which have signed them, one on civil and political rights, and the other on economic, social and cultural rights. Several other treaties on specific rights, such as the rights of women and of children, have also been adopted by the UN. Explain that human rights come in different categories but they are all equally important.

Give examples for each category:

political rights (right to vote),  
civil rights (right to freedom of opinion),  
equality rights (right to be free from racism),  
economic rights (right to be paid fairly for work),  
social rights (right to an education) and cultural rights (right to speak one's own language).

Explain that the UN works to protect human rights by setting standards and establishing the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to coordinate all its human rights related activities.

Explain that one of the special treaties on human rights is a treaty just about the rights that children have. Distribute the simplified version of the Rights of the Child Declaration.

Children to volunteer to read each right out loud. What does each mean?

What responsibilities do the Rights of the Child imply? As a group, draw up a list of classroom rules that ensure everyone's rights are respected. Try to reach agreement on each rule. Post the rules on the wall as a miniature charter of rights for the classroom.

Ask the students to think of one rule that they believe is the most important for the world to be peaceful and for everyone's rights to be respected. Get them to write three lines:

My rule is.... The UN can help by... Canada can help by...