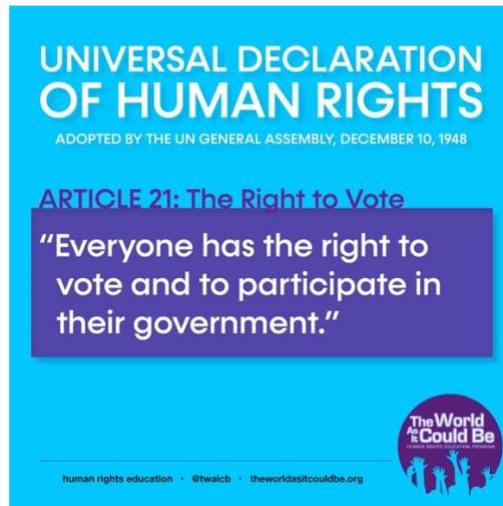


**THE WORLD AS IT COULD BE HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION PROGRAM
TEACHING GUIDE ON THE RIGHT TO VOTE AND PARTICIPATE IN ONE'S GOVERNMENT**

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As we approach the November 3, 2020 Presidential election, *The World As It Could Be* Human Rights Education Program (TWAICB) is pleased to present a teaching guide for educators and community leaders on the importance of exercising our right to take part in our government and express our will through our votes.

We at TWAICB are presenting information on voting through the lens of human rights. In our work, including our [Curriculum and Resource Guide](#) geared to High School, when the UDHR is supposed to be taught, we bring attention to the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) and its continuing relevance to inspire the positive social change that furthers equality, justice and dignity for all people.

BACKGROUND ON THE MEANING OF HUMAN RIGHTS, THE UDHR & HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

- **Definition of Human Rights**

Human rights are held by all persons equally, universally, and forever. Human rights are the basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity. These rights are inalienable. This means you cannot lose these rights just as you cannot cease to be a human being. Human rights are indivisible. In other words, no right is more important than another. Human rights are interdependent. Each right is connected with other rights.

The UDHR is both inspirational and practical. Human rights principles hold the vision of a free, just, and peaceful world. On a practical level, the UDHR sets minimum standards of how individuals and institutions everywhere should treat people. To promote human rights is to demand that the human dignity of all people is respected. By accepting universal human rights, ones also accept duties to the community to defend human dignity.

Human rights should not be understood as only issues that occur in far-away places. Human rights are present in our everyday lives and in our local community.

As Eleanor Roosevelt said, *“Where, after all, do universal rights begin? In small places, close to home...Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal*

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opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."

- **Historical Context of the UDHR**

The UDHR grew from a global commitment to prevent future atrocities experienced during World War II. The concept of defending human dignity based on a sense of shared community has its roots in many cultural and religious traditions. Sacred texts such as the Koran and the bible, as well as civic documents, such as the Magna Carta (1215) and the US Constitution and Bill of Rights (1791) provide a foundation for human rights.

At the end of World War II, nations came together to create the United Nations with a charter to promote international peace and prevent conflict. Calls from across the globe voiced their demand for mechanisms beyond international conflict resolution. Strong support for an international framework to protect citizens from abuses by their government and to hold nations accountable for the treatment of those living in their borders culminated in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- **Drafting and Adoption of the UDHR**

- **Human Rights Commission**

A Human Rights Commission was created with members including human rights experts from around the world. In 1945 over 5,000 participants attended the [conference in San Francisco \(1945\)](#) to address the role of individual rights within the United Nations.

The Commission elected Eleanor Roosevelt as their chairperson because of her political stature and personal commitment to social justice. Under the leadership of the "First Lady of the World" the document survived various iterations, attacks and political pressure stemming from the emerging Cold War.



On December 10, 1948, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by forty-eight of the fifty-six members of the United Nations, with eight abstentions. The abstaining members were Byelorussia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Ukraine, The USSR, Yugoslavia, South Africa and Saudi Arabia. The language of the document was designed to not simply suggest or recommend, but to proclaim a universal vision. By creating it as a universal declaration, not a treaty, it was intended not to be legally binding, but morally binding. Over the last 72 years, the influence of the document has been substantial. Its principles have been incorporated by most of the more than 185 nations in the UN. The UDHR has become an international standard for all people and nations.

- **Clarification of differences between Declaration and Convention/Covenant/Treaty**

Convention, covenant and treaty are synonymous and refer to a legally binding agreement between governments that have signed them. In the United States a treaty may be signed by the President, but must be ratified by the US Senate. A Declaration is a document stating agreed upon standards, but it is not legally binding. While the UDHR is a Declaration, it has led to the ratification

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of a number of treaties, and, in and of itself, is now considered Customary Law, again, as noted above, as the international standard for all people and nations.

Relevance of the UDHR to Current Civic Dialogue and Engagement

- Since 1948 the document has served to articulate a promise of all countries to create a world described by its words
- While the document calls for widespread education to make its message known, only 8% of the U.S. population are aware of its existence
- The document provides a framework to see current endeavors, whether civil rights, women's rights, or other such pursuits, share a common goal of achieving fairness, equality and dignity for all.
- Requires individual and local action to realize its words.

Definition of Human Rights Education

- In proclaiming the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education in December 1994, the General Assembly defined human rights education as *"a life-long process by which people at all levels of development and in all strata of society learn respect for the dignity of others and the means and methods of ensuring that respect in all societies."* The Assembly emphasized that the responsibility for human rights education rested with all elements of society--government, nongovernmental organizations, professional associations, and all other sectors of civil society, as well as individuals.
- Human rights education and training encompasses:
 - Education about human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection;
 - Education through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners;
 - Education for human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others.
- On December 11, 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted the [Declaration of Human Rights Education and Training](#) that spells out the importance of Human Rights Education at every level of community, from schools to public safety agencies, based on the principles of the UDHR.

Activities to Deepen Learning of the UDHR and Human Rights Concepts:

- Assign participants to seek out photographs, artwork, poems and songs that reflect ideas and images in connection with human rights
- Work with the participants to create a virtual gallery of the items they have collected; Then, ask participants to describe their gallery item and why they chose their particular contribution
- Distribute the UDHR document, choosing the simplified or long version
- Have participants read the different sections of the document out loud
- Have the participants connect the UDHR Articles with the different gallery exhibit items

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Discussion Questions to Guide Deeper Reflection and Critical Thinking:

1. Why was it so necessary to develop the UDHR?
2. Why was including the right to leisure and the enjoyment of arts and culture seen as so important?
3. If you were drafting the UDHR today, what other rights would you want to include, and why?
4. Why is it important for people everywhere to know about the UDHR?
5. How does knowing about the UDHR fit in with knowing about the U.S. Constitution?

Resources for Learning More About the UDHR and Human Rights Education:

Pages 24-28 of TWAICB [Curriculum and Resource Guide](#).

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OUR HUMAN RIGHT TO VOTE AND PARTICIPATE IN OUR GOVERNMENT

UDHR Article 21 states the following:

- (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
- (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his/her country.
- (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

HOW TO TAKE PART IN OUR GOVERNMENT

[Here is a link](#) to the U.S. Government's website that explains the structure of our government, showing and explaining each branch. One opportunity to participate in government is to run for office, whether at a very local level, like the School Board of your community, or as a candidate for President. [Check out this 2015 NPR program](#) to learn more about what is involved in running.

Speak Up to Your Representatives

A vital way to take part in government is to speak up to your representatives, whether local, county, state or national, to have your voice heard on issues that matter to you. [Here is a link](#) to TWAICB's Resources for Speaking Up page, providing information on how to effectively speak up, as well as how to find your Representatives and their contact information.

Have Good Information Before You Speak Up

We all use the Internet as a main source of news and information, yet we need to make sure that the information we are getting is based on fact and is from reliable sources. TWAICB has compiled [Resources to be Well Informed](#) and [Before You Act, Do This](#), to provide access to information about how to make sure you have the best possible material from which to gain an understanding of issues, as well as to formulate points to make when speaking up.

Discussion Questions to Guide Deeper Reflection and Critical Thinking:

1. What is meant by "Participatory Democracy?"
2. What is the responsibility of members of the community to support an effective participatory democracy?
3. What can be the result of people staying silent?
4. What are examples in world history that reflect positive change because people spoke up?
5. What are examples in world history of destructive events because people did not speak up?

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HOW TO EXERCISE YOUR RIGHT TO VOTE & WHY THIS MATTERS

[With this link](#) you can review the history of U.S. voting laws and learn more about how voting rights have been fought for since the start of U.S. history. In 2016, TWAICB published [this blog](#) on human rights and voting. We included the following links that we hope you’ll review now regarding [the history of voter turnout in the U.S.](#) and how to make sure [you are registered](#) to vote.

As you consider candidates for office from state representatives, to national Senators and Representative and the Presidency, learn more about what [political party platforms are about](#), and why they matter. You can also review the [Democratic Party Platform](#), the [2016 Republican Platform](#), and [information on the significance of the Republican Party not publishing a 2020 Platform](#), to gain an understanding of what each party stands for at each level of government. The League of Women Voter’s has provided [this resource](#) to guide how to evaluate candidates at each level of office.

Check out [this video produced by YelloPain](#) to get great insights on why voting matters, from the most local level to the office of President.

Discussion Questions to Guide Deeper Reflection and Critical Thinking:

1. Why is voting considered such an important part of a participatory democracy?
2. What can cause people to feel that their vote doesn’t matter?
3. Why would people want to keep others from voting?
4. What would you tell people about why it does make a difference if everyone votes?
5. How does knowing about the UDHR help you think about the right to vote?
6. How does knowing that taking part in one’s government and voting are human rights help you consider actions about your own voting and insuring that others have access to these rights?
7. What human rights issues are we facing as a country?
 - a. Which UDHR Articles are connected to these issues?
 - b. How can you find out how local, state and national candidates would act to address these issues?

Activities to Deepen Understanding of the Importance of the Rights Spelled out in Article 21:

1. Assign math research on such topics as:
 - ◆ The population of each state and the state’s number of electoral college votes
 - ◆ Each state’s number of registered voters, broken down by political party and as undecided
 - ◆ The voter turnout percentages by state, or for your own state, and within the state by county
2. Hold an election for a local leadership position, such as Sheriff and have at least 2 candidates
 - ◆ Assign people to look up the responsibilities of this position and the types of policies this leader can formulate or uphold in carrying out the responsibilities, and to then work with a given candidate to develop a platform

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- ◆ Arrange a debate for the candidates to present their ideas and how they will serve the community
- ◆ Have people create posters for their candidate
- ◆ Hold the vote and publish the outcome
- ◆ Have a discussion on how people decided who to vote for and what this election process meant to them

This teaching guide can be accessed on-line at <https://www.theworldasitcouldbe.org/teaching-guide-on-the-right-to-vote-and-participate-in-ones-government/>.