

Children's rights

What are human rights?

Human rights are the essentials to which every human being is entitled including: food, water, health care, education, shelter, security, a livelihood, information, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, rest, leisure and participation. The word 'rights' is used because it recognises that people have an entitlement to these things and that it is the responsibility of governments to provide for them. Human rights apply to everyone, regardless of race, gender or age, and it is the duty of governments to ensure that the human rights standards laid down in the declarations which they have ratified are upheld.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was agreed in 1989. It is the most universally accepted human rights instrument in history, having been ratified by a total of 192 countries – every country in the world except for the USA and Somalia. Somalia was unable to ratify the CRC as it had no recognised government. In the USA the CRC is opposed by those who feel it undermines the role of the family and by those who wanted to continue issuing the death penalty to those who committed a crime whilst under the age of 18 - which is against the CRC. (The juvenile death penalty was eventually ruled unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court in March 2005).

In addition to detailed rights on a wide range of subjects, there are also five umbrella rights underpinning the CRC:

- That all children have the right to life, survival and development (Article 6);
- That all rights apply to all children without exception or discrimination of any kind (Article 2);
- That the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (Article 3);
- That states should facilitate the implementation of these rights through adequate resources (Article 4);
- That children's views must be taken into account in all matters affecting them (Article 12).



See also: further information section for details of websites on child rights and to download the complete version of the CRC.

CSC - Street girl, Senegal



Citizenship

Same planet, different lives



Key learning point:

- All children have rights.
- The rights of some children are protected better than others.



Resources: (optional) "Little Book of Children's Rights and Responsibilities" by UNICEF. (They are free and can be ordered on 0870 606 3377 – quote code 32014).



Instructions

1. Handout activity

Ask students to read the poems (or the poems can be read as a way to start the class by the teacher or student) and complete the relevant questions on handouts 1 and 2. Play a clip from the VFTS DVD/video (In the 'Health' section there is a shot of a boy getting up from sleeping with another child outside and putting on his shirt slowly). Then ask students to fill in handouts 3 and 4.

Use students' ideas to the last question as a point for a short class discussion. Bring out the point that all but 2 governments have agreed to the CRC (the only exceptions being Somalia and the United States). So, in theory, all children should have their rights protected. Yet, clearly, street children don't. Ask students why this is. Possible answers that students might give:

- **Poverty** – because people are poor they can't afford the things wealthy people can. Challenge the students and ask: Should poor children have fewer rights than wealthy children?
- **Families** – families don't always protect their children. Challenge the students and ask: should families protect children's rights or should governments?
- **Governments don't care** – ask: Why not? What would make them care?

2. Letter writing activity

Use this last point as a link to the next activity: writing a letter to their local MP to say what they feel about child rights and street children. Tell students they can either do this as an exercise or they can do it for real. The students may need guidance on how to write a formal letter. We would recommend you provide the stamps and envelopes for anyone who would like to do it for real! This can make it a much more powerful exercise. It can be useful to tell students that most people working in campaigning say that one letter on an issue is received as the opinion of a 100 people. (It is commonly accepted that most people even if they have a viewpoint can't be bothered to put pen to paper.) Explain that this kind of activity is 'campaigning' and this is the kind of activity that influences politicians. This can be done by individuals or by people who decide to join together to have more of an impact. Give some examples of organisations who do this. For example, the Consortium for Street Children represents 40 member organisations and they unite under CSC to have more influence with the key people who make decisions about the world, i.e. national governments.

You could take this activity forward in a number of different ways:

- Ask students what else they think is wrong at a local level – then brainstorm what they could do about it.
- Ask students what else they think is wrong at a global level – then brainstorm what they could do about it.



See also: Activity B4c, 'A day's labour', p.34 for an extension activity where students are asked to write an imagined creative piece on being a street child. See also Section B9, 'What can we do?'



National Curriculum

1) Knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens: a) the legal and human rights and responsibilities underpinning society, basic aspects of how they are financed, and the opportunities to contribute; f) the work of community-based, national and international voluntary groups; 3 a) use their imagination to consider other people's experiences.

Same planet, different lives

1a. Read the following poems written by two people who have seen and found out about the lives of street children.

Poem One

The Joy of One and the Tragedy of Another

As I am awakened by the soft touch of my mother's hand on my shoulder, he is awakened by a blow to the face by an angry, intimidating shop owner...

As I rise from the comfort of my bed and into the warmth of my room, he is dragged out of a bin and chucked onto the damp street.

As I wrap up in warm clothing he has found a newspaper to cover himself in...

As I sat down at the table for a hot drink and some breakfast, he is risking his life by stealing an apple.

As I get on the bus for a journey of a mile he runs the same distance on an empty stomach with the police on his back.

As I am met by my friends at the school gate, he is caught by police, beaten and taken to a prison cell.

As I sit in my class talking to all the peaceful people around me, he is cramped in a dingy cell surrounded by murderers, paedophiles and rapists.

As I arrive home from school to get a snack and to eat, he has been released and is looking for a solvent to help him forget the fears for the night.

As I rest peacefully in my bed and drift off to sleep, he has once again been caught by the police this time sniffing glue...

By Ben Harvey (aged 14, Bristol)

Poem Two**A Gift from God Being a Street Child**

What is this gift doing on the street?
Where does this gift sleep?
He sleeps on the street or on the bed like you?
What does this child eat?

This child has a dream but because
he is on the street
he cannot make his dream come true.
He is now using drugs to forget who he is.
What is he doing with his life?
What future does his life on the street have for him?

When the nights come
he has to see where he is going to sleep.
He must drug himself
so that he can pretend he is inside the house
like you
going to sleep on his bed with his warm blankets.

That's only imagination.
The truth is he is going to sleep on the street
And all that strong wind and rain will end up on him.

When he suffers from all these pains –
Who is looking after him
Who is taking care of him
or to the doctor?
He has to wait until he gets better on his own.

These children are people like us.
Let us help them.
They are a gift from God.
Put them first.

Written by Webster Nhlanhla Nxele, a Care-worker at the Street-Wise
centre, South Africa

b. What are the main messages that the two poems are trying to make?

B8a

2. In the video/DVD you have just seen a boy getting up in the morning...how might his life compare to yours? Fill in the following table to say what you do all day and then fill in what you think he might do. Include details like daily activities (e.g. school, work, play etc.), food, travel, how people might treat you, who you spend time with etc.)

Student handout 3

	yours...	his...
5am		
6am		
7am		
8am		
9am		
10am		
11am		
12midday		
1pm		
2pm		
3pm		
4pm		
5pm		
6pm		
7pm		
8pm		
9pm		
10pm		
11pm		
12midnight		
1am		
2am		
3am		
4am		

3. Read the following extracts from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the world's most widely accepted human rights agreement. 192 countries have agreed to it. It has 54 articles. These rights are for all people under 18 (Article 1). They apply equally to everybody without discrimination (Article 2). For example, it doesn't matter what race, sex or colour you are. It doesn't matter what religion you practice, what language you speak, how much money you have or where you live.

Every 'child' (person under 18) has lots of rights to make sure they are respected, safe, looked after, listened to and that they have the opportunity to develop in the best possible way. Some examples include the right to be protected from discrimination (Article 2); being hurt, abused or neglected (Article 19); work that is bad for your health or education (Article 32); and being put in prison with adults (Article 37). Also, every child has the right to life, health and education (Articles 6, 24 & 28); guidance from your parents and family (Article 5); and the right to play and free time (Article 31).

Every child also has the right to: say what you think and be listened to by adults when they make decisions that affect you (Article 12); get information, express what you think, meet with others and join or set up clubs unless it is against other people's rights (Articles 13 & 15); think what you like and have what religion you want, with your parent's guidance (Article 14); and use your own language and practice your own religion and culture (Article 30).

Your government has to do its best to make these rights a reality and to tell all adults and children about the rights in this agreement (Articles 4 & 42).

4. Are all children supposed to have the same rights?

yes no

5. Who do you think has their rights protected more - you or the street child in the video?

you street child

Extension activity:

**Why do you think some children's rights are protected more than others?
Discuss your ideas with a partner and then make a list of your ideas below.**