

Unit Overview

In this final unit, students grapple with the tensions around the definition and universal character of human rights. Building on their understanding of how the legal landscape works within the United States, students consider how the creation and enforcement of international laws and policies compares to the rule of law within a single country.

Students consider whether and how the rule of law should apply across borders, and what it means to balance national values and differences in social, political, and economic priorities with the responsibility to protect all human beings. They learn about human rights violations around the world, and about the role that advocacy can play in shaping and enforcing human rights law. For their unit project, students choose one human rights issue and create a policy brief and public service announcement (PSA) that could be used as part of an advocacy campaign about their chosen issue.

Unit Length

21 50-minute sessions

Unit Project Description

Students take on the role of researchers within a international organization that creates advocacy campaigns about human rights issues. Each student selects one human rights issue, and creates a policy brief and a PSA as two components of a larger campaign on the issue.

As a first step, students conduct research and write a policy brief that could be used to provide information to the press, lawmakers, governing bodies, individuals, or other interested parties. The policy brief will describe the issue, past and present efforts to investigate and address the issue, relevant domestic and international laws and policies, and successes and challenges in enforcing laws related to this issue. The policy brief will also recommend an action that can be taken to better protect human rights related to the issue. After completing their policy brief, students will choose elements of the brief to highlight in a PSA that will inspire others to take action about their chosen issue.

Framing Questions



- What are human rights? What are the debates around the concept of universal human rights?
- How are human rights codified, enforced, and interpreted?
- What challenges exist in the protection of human rights?
- What roles do people in the fields of law, law enforcement, and advocacy play in the protection of human rights?

Understandings



- *Human rights* are defined as rights we all have simply because we are human, but there is an international debate about the nature and extent of universal human rights.
- Human rights are codified, enforced, and interpreted through both domestic and international bodies.
- Enforcement of human rights by domestic courts, inter-governmental organizations, and international tribunals is challenging because of several factors, including national sovereignty and difficulties in monitoring abuses.
- People who work in governmental, inter-governmental, non-governmental, and grassroots organizations promote human rights in the world through data collection, education campaigns, court cases, and direct action.

Law and Justice Content

- History and context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Respective purposes of treaties and declarations
- Role of inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations
- International debates around the codification, interpretation, and enforcement of human rights law
- Relationship between international and domestic law

Skills

- Locate, analyze, synthesize, and apply information about selected human rights issues
- Writing to inform and persuade
- Problem solving and critical thinking