

## Lesson Plan: Eleanor Roosevelt, Human Rights, and You

### Overview

In this interactive lesson students consider four experiences that prepared Eleanor Roosevelt to lead on human rights, then they explore what human rights mean to them, and finally they decide how they each might help make these human rights a reality in the world today.

### Objectives: Students will:

- Learn about some of the skills, traits, and values/beliefs prepared Eleanor Roosevelt to succeed as chairman of the United Nations Human Rights Commission that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Consider what rights they would choose if they were setting up a new country.
- Decide what rights are particularly important to them and design an action plan to help them achieve these rights.

Grade Level: Middle school or high school students

Suggested Time: 2 class periods, or one long block period

### Sources

- Information in Part I on Eleanor Roosevelt's experience can be found at <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/abouteleanor/erbiography.cfm>, the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project biographical essay by Allida Black.
- Life in a New Country: What Rights Would You Choose comes from *Human Rights for All*, Edward O'Brien, Eleanor Greene, and David McQuoid-Mason (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1996). Street Law resources can be found at <http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Index.aspx>

### Materials

- Handouts at end of lesson:
  - ER: Prepared to Lead on Human Rights
  - Abbreviated Version: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1948
  - You and Human Rights: An Action Plan
- Print out and make copies for each student of the complete version of the UDHR available at <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/humanrights/udhr/lang/eng.htm>
- Newsprint, markers, and masking tape

### Procedure

#### **Part I: Eleanor Roosevelt: Prepared to Lead on Human Rights** (30 minutes)

1. Start with Opening Scene – Eleanor Roosevelt (or ER as she referred to herself) on December 10, 1948 at UN: On December 10, 1948 the UN General Assembly approves Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ER saw this as her finest

- achievement: here were 50 disparate countries that varied widely in size, power, history, and culture – meeting after the devastation of WWII in 1948 – a year fraught with conflicts. And Eleanor Roosevelt is keenly aware of her lack of formal education and her status as the US delegation’s only woman member – appointed by President Truman in 1945 to be a delegate to the UN, then elected by their Human Rights Commission to shepherd through the UDHR.
2. Stop and ask (to check for prior knowledge about ER): What do you *already* know about the experiences that might have prepared ER to lead on human rights?
  3. Then distribute handout with four experiences listed. Explain that your task is to figure out *how* she got to this point: How did these experiences prepare her not only to have this role – but to succeed in it? What skills, personal traits, and values did she take from these experiences? DO take notes as we go along.
- 4. ER as a student at the Allenswood Academy in London (1899-1902)**
- In 1899 ER finally got to escape the confines of her home and go to school with people her own age – about your age in fact.
  - ER blossomed at Allenswood, a French-speaking school, making lifelong friends and studying with Marie Souvestre, its remarkable headmistress. Souvestre was a bold, articulate woman who cared about liberal causes and studying history. The three years that Eleanor spent at Allenswood were the happiest years of her adolescence.
  - Souvestre challenged ER to examine both sides of issues, to argue each with equal conviction, and encouraged her to dare and to act. ER learned to state her opinions on controversial political events clearly and concisely. “You cannot understand what you think and why you think it until you can make the argument your fiercest critics make, with the same intensity and conviction.” [NOTE: empathy (understanding another person) does not equal agreement.]
  - ER and this headmistress spent summers together traveling Europe and Eleanor was given all the responsibility for making the travel arrangements. Souvestre insisted on seeing both the grandeur *and* the horrors of the modern industrial world and introduced ER to settlement houses and other reform organizations and encouraged her to look beyond herself. Gradually she gained "confidence and independence."
- How might this experience have prepared ER to succeed in her work at the UN?
- Skills: ability to see and express multiple points of view, take a position and argue well.
  - Traits: confident, independent.
  - Values/beliefs: friendship, seeing beyond self to less fortunate and doing something.

## 5. ER becomes a political force in her own right (1917 to 1928)

- Well before becoming First Lady as the wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt had carefully crafted a life that suited her needs. From 1917 to 1928 ER expanded her political networks and honed her political skills through writing, editing, and public speaking. Working closely with powerful women's organizations in New York State, including
  - The Women's Division of the Democratic State Committee
  - The Women's Trade Union League, and
  - The League of Women Voters

ER brought enthusiasm, dedication, and a lively interest in other people.

- In the 1920s – between the onset of FDR's paralysis in 1921 and his campaign for the NY governorship in 1928 [Governor until 1932] – ER's political contributions and organizational wisdom made her one of New York's leading politicians. Repeatedly she pushed women's and other reform groups to
  - Set realistic goals
  - Prioritize their tasks, and
  - Delegate assignments.

Her pragmatism attracted attention within the party and women's political organizations. Soon the *NY Times* publicized her *clout* (influence, power, effectiveness), treating her as the “woman [of influence] who speaks her political mind.”

- Each week, Eleanor Roosevelt did her homework on the nuts and bolts of politics. She:
  - Studied the *Congressional Record*
  - Examined legislation and committee reports
  - Interviewed members of Congress and the State Assembly, and
  - Met with League (LWV) officers to discuss the information she gathered.

Each month, she assembled her analyses and presented a report for League members outlining the status of bills in which the organization was interested and suggesting strategies to help achieve its legislative goals.

Recognizing the extensive contributions she made, the League elected her its vice-chairman eighteen months later, after ER skillfully arbitrated (helped to settle) a hostile internal organization dispute.

- And during this time ER also taught high school history and civics at the private Todhunter School for girls in New York City, a job she loved.
- How might these experiences have prepared ER to succeed in her work at the UN?

- Skills: get the big picture and see where the details fit in, delegate tasks, maintain good relationships, run meetings and keep people on task, resolve conflicts.
- Traits: pragmatic, patient, persistent.
- Values/Beliefs: From teaching – concern for young people and the importance of a good education. Valuing the lives of poor people/families, especially the need for decent housing.

## 6. ER as First Lady visits a coal mine in 1935

- By June 1933 ER's travels got her headline attention across the country. In 1933 a *New Yorker* cartoon poked fun at the idea that she might dare go into a coal mine. Then on May 21, 1935 Eleanor Roosevelt made headline news: "First Lady Tours Coal Mine in Ohio" (*New York Times*). It would be a two-hour trip ER told Lorena Hickok, her friend and newspaper reporter who accompanied her, "we will get dirty. So wear suitable clothes, if you know what is suitable. I confess I am stumped."
- They arrived at noon. Mrs. Roosevelt declined the new pair of overalls provided for her, but accepted a grey coat, donned a miners' hard hat, and sat in the first car of a six-car train, heading two miles into the mine. For over an hour and a half they watched four hundred miners working in the two-mile stretch in what was thought to be a model mine, one of the safest in the nation.
- An eyewitness report stated: "Standing with one foot on a pile of coal, under a mountain two and a half miles from daylight the President's wife today discussed wages and working conditions, safety precautions and mining methods, with miners black with coal dust."
- ER emerged from the mine late in the afternoon and spoke briefly with three hundred miners who were ending their shift. Afterward, ER addressed the first graduates of "the People's University," in Bellaire, Ohio. A community-involved adult education miners' school that featured over forty courses, the university was initiated by local activists, teachers, unionists, and housewives, who taught two hundred students without salary. ER considered it an inspiring project and told her audience of 2,500: "We must educate ourselves to study changes and to meet these changes." Americans must begin to "know each other's problems."

(For more on this topic see our Case Study: Eleanor Roosevelt's Visit to Coal Mine (1935) at <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/case-studies/> )

- How might this experience have prepared ER to succeed in her work at the UN?
  - Skills: desire to see for herself – curiosity – and to ask questions
  - Traits: curious, gutsy/courageous

- Values/Beliefs: Concern about safe and decent working conditions, belief in education for adults as well as young people.

## 7. ER and seeing war up close and personal during World War I and World War II

- When FDR was Assistant Secretary of the Navy, what she saw during World War I radicalized ER. When she saw shell-shocked [PTSD] veterans confined to a filthy mental institution, (St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington DC) she organized a campaign to help them.
- In the early 1940s as the nation teetered toward what became World War II, FDR told Americans that "Dr. New Deal" needed to become "Dr. Win the War." He knew that the Allies needed not only to win a military victory but define what shape the postwar world should take. Their battle would be a battle to preserve a world grounded in four freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom to worship, freedom from fear and freedom from want. ER experienced World War II up close and personal: two of her sons were active military when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and it was ER's voice on radio that was there to calm the nation on December 7, 1941.
- In 1943 ER took a rigorous five-week tour of American troops in the Pacific which changed her life. There she visited military hospitals, ate in the mess halls and in one case walked down a road to say good bye and good luck to truckloads of men on their way to the battlefield. Meeting thousands of wounded and frightened soldiers and sailors humbled and terrified her. ER was determined that the U.S. *not* "win the war but lose the peace" as in World War I.
- The Four Freedoms became part of ER's personal mission after FDR's death. The unimaginable horrors of WWII, the Holocaust, and the atomic bomb reinforced the central importance of shelter, food, and a safe community in people's lives. (The Four Freedoms refer to the four "essential human freedoms" outlined by President Roosevelt in his State of the Union message on January 6, 1941: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want and freedom from fear of armed aggression.)
- How might these experiences have prepared ER to succeed in her work at the UN?
  - Skills: capacity to travel widely & use what she encounters.
  - Traits: determined, energetic, caring
  - Values/Beliefs: Commitment to work/fight to prevent war, 4 freedoms {of speech, to worship, from want and from fear}

## 8. Summarize the key points to take away from these experiences:

Eleanor Roosevelt came to her tasks at the United Nations – to lead the drafting of the UDHR and shepherding it through to acceptance – extremely well prepared and equipped to take on the challenges she faced. From the four experiences we looked at ER had gained what she needed to succeed:

Skills: ability to see and express multiple pts of view, take a position and argue well; get the big picture, see where the details fit in, delegate tasks, maintain good relationships, run meetings and keep people on task, resolve conflicts; desire to see for herself – curiosity – and to ask questions; capacity to travel widely & use what she encounters.

Traits: confident, independent; pragmatic, patient, persistent; curious, gutsy/courageous; determined, energetic, caring.

Values/beliefs: friendship, seeing beyond self to less fortunate and doing something about the situation; concern for young people and the importance of a good education, Valuing the lives of poor people/families, especially the need for decent housing; Concern about safe and decent working conditions, belief in education for adults as well as young people; Commitment to work/fight to prevent war, 4 freedoms {of speech, to worship, from want and from fear}.

## **Part II: Life in a New Country: What Rights Would You Choose? (45 minutes)**

NOTE: Before starting, set up students so that five are seated at each table or combination of desks.

1. Now you'll have an opportunity to use some of these skills as you start from scratch and decide: What Rights Would You Choose?
2. You have decided to leave the country in which you have been living in order to go, with others, to a new country where people have never lived before. In order to set up the best possible society, you and your group decide to make a list of the rights guaranteed everyone in the new country.
3. But first on your own, list at least three rights you think should be guaranteed. [They can use the reverse side of the first handout for this.]
4. Next, share and discuss the rights each of you listed in groups of 5, and as a group decide on no more than eight rights that you agree are important. Are there any rights that some think should definitely not be included?
5. List your group's choices on newsprint – write large enough so that the whole group can see them.
6. NOTE: Have one student from each group stand with their newsprint page or tape each newsprint list to the wall. Compare the lists of rights from all groups: Which rights have all groups listed? Which ones do only some groups have? (Circle or mark these as students make their observations.)
7. Read the one-page Abbreviated Version of the UDHR (handout at end of lesson). Are the rights that appear on all groups' lists in the UDHR? How about the rights which appear on more than one list—but not on all lists—are they in the UDHR? And those on just one list? What does the appearance of many rights on their lists and in the UDHR indicate? (hopefully – universality)

8. Do any rights on the lists contradict or conflict with one another? [Examples: freedom of speech might conflict with others' rights to be free from discrimination (a racial slur); the right of access to medical care might conflict with another's freedom of religion; and property rights of some might be seen as conflicting with rights of others to earn a living wage, etc. Cultural rights also frequently come into conflict with some human rights (American Indian traditional claims to land might conflict with a non-Indian's legal claim to the same property.)]
9. Now distribute and have students read to themselves the Complete Version of the UDHR including the Preamble. This provides a more complete picture – and deeper appreciation – of these rights as described in 1948. Check out the wording especially of the rights that you and your group selected.
10. **If time allows you can add:** Let's look at the classifying process that was central to discussions and arguments that ER and the Human Rights Commission had in 1946-48: people often disagree as to which are most important:
  - Civil and political rights—liberty-oriented rights, give people freedom to think and access to information, freedom to act and to choose what to do, and freedom to join in the political life of their country
  - Social and economic rights—security-oriented rights that provide social and economic security; protect people from having basic things taken away from them, such as food, shelter, and health care; is the government obliged to provide these even if it cannot afford to?
  - Environmental, cultural, and developmental rights—people have a right to live in a clean, pollution-free environment; and have the right to cultural, political, and economic development.

### **Part III: You and Human Rights: An Action Plan (45 minutes)**

1. Now it's time to use what you've learned about human rights and consider your role. Which of the human rights listed in the UDHR do you care most about? Pick ONE. Your job is to figure out why this matters to you and how you can make it a reality for people now and in the future. Here's our process: Toward an action plan: consider and answer these questions (on handout) – please work on your own. Highlight and explain as follows:
  - 1) What one right did you pick? Why do you care about this right?  
Only one. Be clear about which one you choose. Select one and persuade us that it really matters to you and why. What might happen if this right is NOT protected?
  - 2) What skills, traits, and values/beliefs do you have that might help you accomplish your goals in this area?  
Remember ER's experiences and think about particular experiences you have had so far from which you have gained skills and that have helped to shape your beliefs.
  - 3) What (additional) training and experience might you need to succeed here?

Think about what you might need to learn how to do to work toward obtaining these rights for others.

- 4) What groups, organizations, or individuals work for this right and how might you contact them to get information?  
Who does this work now? Think local, state, national, international – depending on where you might want to do this.
  - 5) Where can you imagine joining in this work? Keep in mind ER's words: "Where after all do universal human rights begin? ..."  
Ask for a volunteer to read the ER quote and emphasize "concerted citizen action."
  - 6) What barriers or challenges might you encounter? How might you overcome them?  
If this were easy... we would have already accomplished it! Why/how is it hard work?
2. Ask for volunteers to be interviewed [two or three students, one at a time]. Try for two or three different rights. The point is to support the volunteers in their thinking, complicate and expand on their thinking. Examples: "tell us more about how/why/where you might do this..." Get other girls and the Leadership Team to make useful, helpful suggestions. What might help [use name] think this through?
  3. Thank volunteers & applaud!
  4. **Closing:** Thank students for their excellent energy and participation and wish them each success with their plan.



## Eleanor Roosevelt: Prepared to Lead on Human Rights

Our task is to figure out how ER got to her leadership role at the UN. What experiences prepared her not only to have this role – but to succeed in it? What **skills, personal traits, and values or beliefs** did she take from these experiences?

1. ER as a student at the Allenswood Academy in London (1899-1902)
2. ER becomes a political force in her own right (1917 to 1928)
3. ER as First Lady visits a coal mine in 1935
4. ER and seeing war up close and personal

## **Abbreviated Version:**

### **Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1948**

Now, therefore, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms:

Article 1	Right to Equality
Article 2	Freedom from Discrimination
Article 3	Right to Life, Liberty and Personal Security
Article 4	Freedom from Slavery
Article 5	Freedom from Torture, Degrading Treatment
Article 6	Right to Recognition as a Person before the Law
Article 7	Right to Equality before the Law
Article 8	Right to Remedy by Competent Tribunal
Article 9	Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest, and Exile
Article 10	Right to Fair Public Hearing
Article 11	Right to be considered Innocent until proven Guilty
Article 12	Freedom from Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, and Correspondence
Article 13	Right to Free Movement in and out of the Country
Article 14	Right to Asylum in other Countries from Persecution
Article 15	Right to a Nationality and Freedom to Change It
Article 16	Right to Marriage and Family
Article 17	Right to own Property
Article 18	Freedom of Belief and Religion
Article 19	Freedom of Opinion and Information
Article 20	Right of Peaceful Assembly and Association
Article 21	Right to Participate in Government and in Free Elections
Article 22	Right to Social Security
Article 23	Right to Desirable Work and to join Trade Unions
Article 24	Right to Rest and Leisure
Article 25	Right to Adequate Living Standard
Article 26	Right to Education
Article 27	Right to Participate in the Cultural Life of Community
Article 28	Right to Social Order assuming Human Rights
Article 29	Community Duties essential to Free and Full Development
Article 30	Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the above Rights

Source: *Human Rights for All*, Edward O'Brien, Eleanor Greene, and David McQuoid-Mason (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1996). Street Law resources can be found at <http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Index.aspx>

## **You and Human Rights: An Action Plan**

Here are questions to consider:

1. What one right did you pick? Why do you care about this right?
2. What skills, traits, and values/beliefs do you have that might help you accomplish your goals in this area?
3. What (additional) training and experience might you need to succeed here?
4. What groups, organizations, or individuals work for this right and how might you contact them to get information?
5. Where can you imagine joining in this work? Keep in mind ER's words at the United Nations in 1958:

“Where after all do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they *are* the world of the individual person: The neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”
6. What barriers or challenges might you encounter? How might you overcome them?