

Fighters for rights

"It is an ideal to live for and to achieve." Nelson Mandela

THEMES



GEN. HUMAN RIGHTS



MEDIA



CITIZENSHIP

COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 2

GROUP SIZE



ANY

TIME



60 MINUTES

- Themes** General human rights, Media, Citizenship
- Complexity** Level 2
- Group size** Any
- Time** 60 minutes
- Overview** This activity uses information cards to stimulate interest in human rights heroes. The issues addressed are:
- Political repression
 - Human rights activists in the twentieth century
 - The struggle for rights in various countries
- Related rights**
- Freedom of opinion and expression
 - The right to a fair trial
 - The right not to be tortured.
- Objectives**
- To learn about some of the individuals who have fought for human rights in different countries
 - To develop skills of handling and ordering information, co-operation and group work skills
 - To promote respect, responsibility and curiosity about human rights.
- Materials**
- One set of thirty cards per small group
 - Scissors
 - Envelopes
 - Optional: glue and pieces of stiff paper for backing the cards
- Preparation**
- Arrange the room so that people can work in small groups
 - Make copies of the cards on the handouts, so that you have one set for each small group
 - Cut up each set of thirty cards, shuffle them so that they are not in sequence, and put them in envelopes. It is important to keep the sets separate from each other!

Instructions

1. Ask people to get into small groups (3 or 4 in each group), and hand out one set of cards to each group.
2. Ask them to spread the cards out, face down on the floor.
3. Explain that the cards describe events in the life of six human rights activists. The aim for each group is to match the events with the correct character, and thereby to build up a brief description of each person.
4. Explain that each of the characters is made up of a "set of five" (i.e. one 'A', one 'B', one 'C', one 'D' and one 'E' card).
5. Tell each group to do rounds of picking up one card at a time, until the cards run out.

6. Give people a few minutes to read their own cards in silence.
7. Then let them go... Allow each group to devise their own strategies for building up the personalities. They will need about 15 - 20 minutes for this stage.
8. Gather everyone together, and ask a representative from one group to introduce, in their own words, one of the personalities. Then repeat with the other groups in turn, so each personality is presented in full, and each group can check that they put the "pieces" together correctly.

Debriefing and evaluation

1. How easy was the exercise, and which strategies did the different groups use to sort the sets of cards?
2. Which of the characters had people already heard of, and which of them were new? Why were some of the personalities better known than others?
3. Were people surprised by any of the information? What did they find most impressive?
4. Ask people to select the quotation with which they most strongly identify: how do they think they would have behaved if they had been put in the same position as this person?
5. What actions are available to people?

Tips for facilitators

There is a huge amount of information available on each of these characters and the short biographies that have been supplied offer a very shallow (and subjective) perspective on the matter. There are also hundreds of other activists who could just as well have gone onto the list - those selected here are intended only to give a "taster", and a way into the subject.

Suggestions for follow-up

It is highly recommended that you try to follow up this activity by encouraging people to find out about other human rights activists, so that they develop a feel for the characters who throughout history have contributed to the struggle for human rights. The group could start to build up its own "portrait gallery" of human rights activists. The six given in this activity can be used as a starting point: the photographs can be stuck to pieces of card together with the quotations and the short biographies, and displayed about the room. Each member of the group could be asked to find out about other personalities and to add them to the portrait gallery. The six that have been introduced here are all campaigners in the area of civil and political rights, but you may want to extend the range of rights to include social and economic ones as well. In civil society there are several channels for expressing opinion and fighting for rights. If you want to take a closer look at these you could do the activity "Making links", on page 173.

Ideas for action

Find out about some of the current political prisoners or activists – for example, those that Amnesty International has labelled a "Prisoner of Conscience". Write a letter or organise a campaign to inform people about this prisoner, and to put pressure on the relevant individuals to release him or her.

Key date

10 December
Human Rights Day

Further information

Useful web-sites giving information on human rights activists:

www.speaktruthtopower.org
www.universalrights.net/heroes
www.globalyouthconnect.org
www.hrw.org

The UK Section of Amnesty International have produced their own historical wall chart of human rights defenders, which can be ordered through their website: www.amnesty.org.uk

HANDOUTS

Discussion cards

A
 “I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

Nelson Mandela

A
 “As a result of certain painful but at the same time comforting encounters, I saw for myself how from the depths of moral savagery there suddenly arose the cry ‘it’s my fault’ and how, with this cry, the patient recovered the right to call himself a human being.”

Evgenia Ginzburg

B
 Born in a village near Umtata, and was elected President of the Republic of South Africa in the first democratic elections in that country at the age of 76. Up to that point – and beyond - his/her life was devoted to

B
 Born in 1906 in Russia and died in Moscow in 1977. Worked quietly as a teacher and journalist until branded a terrorist by the Stalin regime in a fabricated trial. Spent 18 years in

C
 the fight against apartheid, the racist system used by the former white government to suppress the majority black population. S/he suffered various forms of repression: was banned from meetings, forced to go into hiding, and was finally

C
 Siberian prison camps under horrifying conditions because s/he refused to accuse others of crimes they did not commit. Spent the first year in solitary confinement in a damp cell, forbidden to exercise, speak, sing or lie down in the day. Later on s/he was

D
 arrested, and sentenced to life imprisonment at the age of 44. S/he spent the next 28 years of his/her life behind bars, away from his/her family and children.

D
 sent from one to another of the Siberian labour camps - including, as a punishment for helping a fellow prisoner, the very worst, from which few returned alive.



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A
 "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.' I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character." *Martin Luther King*

A
 "Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man."
Mahatma Gandhi

B
 Born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1929, when the law required blacks to occupy special seats in buses, theatres and cinemas, and to drink from separate water fountains from whites. When s/he was 28, co-founded

B
 Born in 1869, to Hindu parents who lived in Gujarat, when India was still held by force in the British Empire. S/he led the struggle for Independence, never straying from his/her firm belief in

C
 an organisation of black churches that encouraged non-violent marches, demonstrations and boycotts against racial segregation. The organisation participated in a protest in Birmingham, Alabama, at which hundreds of singing school children

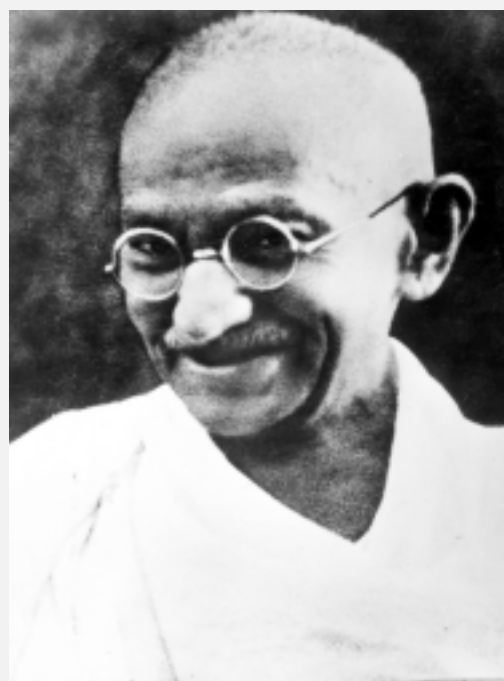
C
 non-violent protest and religious tolerance, despite being arrested and imprisoned on several occasions. When Indians acted violently against one another, or against the British Raj, s/he fasted until the violence ended. S/he led a 241 mile march across India, and

D
 filled the streets in support. The police were ordered in with attack dogs and firemen with high-pressure hoses. S/he was arrested and jailed.

D
 persuaded followers to accept the brutality of the police and soldiers without retaliation. S/he spent a total of 2338 days in jail in a life tirelessly devoted to peace.



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A
 “We’re not trying to destroy or annihilate the military regime; they are always threatening to annihilate us but ... the purpose of our movement is to create a society that offers security to all our people, including the military.”
Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

A
 “Alas, this sad song in my mind I send to those who help prisoners. These feelings in this dark season - I will never forget the horrible tortures. May this present misery in prison never be inflicted on any sentient being.”
Ngawang Sangdrol

B
 Born in 1945, in Burma, s/he was the child of the assassinated national hero in the struggle for independence from colonial rule. Became a popular leader of the struggle for democracy against

B
 is a Buddhist nun who believes Tibet should be independent from China, and who was arrested for the first time at the age of 10 by Chinese authorities. His/her only crime was to participate in

C
 a cruel military regime and was nearly assassinated by an army unit ordered to aim their rifles at him/her. Was placed under house arrest for 6 years without being charged with any crime, and was effectively cut off from the outside world. Even when released, the government

C
 a peaceful demonstration for the independence of Tibet. Was arrested again at the age of 15, and sentenced to 3 years imprisonment. The sentence was extended first because s/he sang an independence song in prison; and then again for 8 years because s/he

D
 prevented him/her from seeing his/her dying spouse. In 2001 s/he is still confined to his/her residence, with access tightly controlled and the telephone lines cut.

D
 shouted “Free Tibet” while standing in the rain in the prison yard. Today s/he has problems with her kidneys as a result of the torture s/he has suffered.



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