

# Letters to a Prisoner



A Social Justice Toolkit for Communities & Schools



# Write for Rights

Write a letter, save a life



© Grzegorz Żukowski for Amnesty International

Activists writing letters at the 'main stage' Write for Rights event in Warsaw, Poland 2014.

## INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure that Amnesty International Canada introduces, *Letters to a Prisoner* (Owlkids Books, 2017), by Montreal author Jacques Goldstyn. Told entirely through illustrations, *Letters to a Prisoner* is a children's book inspired by the global Write for Rights campaign. This wordless picture book speaks to the power of hope and the written word. This educational toolkit was created in partnership with Owlkids Books with the intent of supporting human rights education for children and youth ages 6 and up.

Amnesty International Canada invites you to use this kit to start exploring themes of human rights and activism, with a specific focus on youth. It is an engaging and interactive introduction to human rights, to promote empathy and solidarity, and, hopefully, to act as a stepping-stone towards the wider ongoing work of Amnesty International's youth campaigning and activism.

The activities included in this toolkit are group sessions that can be initiated for periods ranging from 15 minutes to 1 hour. Plain language versions of selected Write for Rights letter-writing cases will be available each year on the Amnesty Canada website.

By getting to know the individuals in the book and the case study, youth will grow to understand that they are part of a massive global movement of people. They – and you – can bring about a real change in the lives of others.

We hope that this activity kit will enable you to educate young people about human rights and encourage them to join with hundreds of thousands of others who will be fighting for human rights.

## You can make a difference!

### Human Rights Education for All

Human rights education has been part of Amnesty International since 1961, along with signing petitions and sending letters. Human rights education has a number of main objectives, including informing people about their own rights, making them aware of human rights violations in the world and empowering people with real understanding and skills to enable them to fight against these violations.

The activities in this kit provide an introduction to human rights for young people in a relatable way. Human rights are not presented as an abstract ideal, but as real issues affecting real people.

### Young Activists as Active Participants in Write for Rights

Every year, around Human Rights Day on December 10th, hundreds of thousands of people around the world write letters and send email messages to help people they have never met. Letter writing has always been at the core of Amnesty's work, and over 60 years of human rights activism show that letters really do have the power to change lives.

Young people are important for Write for Rights, not because they are the leaders of tomorrow, not because this will be their world in a few generations, but because they are excellent campaigners, organizers and leaders. We hope to provide the early tools with which to do that, now.

# YOUR WORDS CHANGE LIVES



© Amnesty International Norway (photo: Siv Dolmen)

Human rights education workshop in Oslo, Norway 2013.

## CONTENTS

Five activities are included in this kit, each one involving learning points in human rights and/or some form of active participation in the campaign.

**Activity 1** gets participants up and about with an ice-breaker activity to introduce the Human Rights in accessible child-friendly language.

**Activity 2** presents picture-book, *Letters to a Prisoner*. It is a discussion-based activity, meant to analyze readers' reactions to the story by drawing connections and engaging emotions.

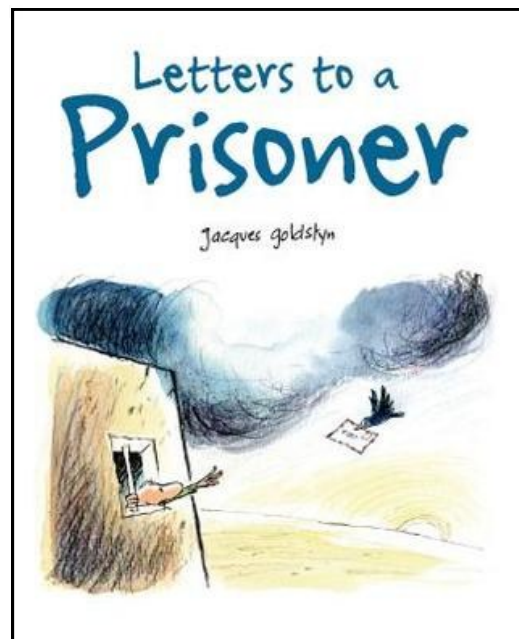
**Activity 3** is another physical activity to encourage understanding of inclusion/exclusion and to promote responsibility and togetherness.

**Activity 4** involves practicing writing letters of solidarity, first to the characters in the book and then to one of the individuals or groups featured in this year's Write for Rights campaign.

**Activity 5** involves discussion surrounding human rights defenders and activism, where participants will plan an awareness-raising campaign of their own.

These activities can be run independently or as a series, all at once or over a number of days. You may also adapt and extend discussions and introduce additional materials to suit your needs.

There are background tools and resources included in this guide for each of the activities, including a template for the letter-writing activity.



Owlkids Books, 2017



Human rights education workshop in Bangalore, India 2015.

## What are Human Rights?

Human rights are those rights that are necessary in order for us to live as human beings. Human rights give us dignity, equality, and freedom. Human rights ensure that we all have adequate access to basic needs such as food and shelter. Human rights protect us from violence and abuse and work against ignorance and hatred. Human rights are inherent in all human beings and they should *never* be denied.

Human rights are universal. They transcend borders, cultures, personal, and personal and religious beliefs. No matter where you live in the world, who your parents are, or what kind of government you have, human rights are your rights.

Human rights allow us to fully develop our human abilities. They protect our right to participate in society, to work and provide for ourselves, to practice our culture and speak our language, to live in peace, and to be free from harm.



Most importantly, human rights are about respecting one another. They are about fulfilling our responsibility to ensure that no one's human rights are violated. For example, it is your right to go to school and receive an education. No one should take that away from you. When any person is denied human rights we are all affected.

Human rights are only as strong as our willingness to treat one another as equals. Recognizing this is the first step in achieving "freedom, justice and peace in the world."

Human Rights are complicated concepts to learn, we understand—for anyone, let alone children and youth!

If participants have ongoing questions that cannot be answered in the moment or even within the scope of your session, consider creating a "Learning Garden," such as a blackboard or poster. Then, when participants have emergent and probing questions, they can be written down in the Learning Garden.

That way, later, you can explore those questions further, together making your collective knowledge flourish!

# ACTIVITY 01: HELPING HANDS



## ABOUT THIS SESSION:

Participants will become aware of the rights and responsibilities we all share as human beings in accessible child-friendly language. For more advanced participants, it can also serve as an introduction to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (see page 12).

**TIME NEEDED:** 15-20 Minutes

## OBJECTIVES:

- Develop basic understanding of human rights and responsibilities.
- Expand knowledge and critical-thinking abilities.
- Improve literacy, communication, and teamwork skills.

## PREPARATION AND RESOURCES:

- 20 paper or cardboard hands. This can be prior to the activity, or you can have participants help you with this during an arts or crafts period where they can trace and decorate their own hand.
- Write either a Right or a Responsibility on each of the hands (see page 11), in advance. Make enough hands for everyone participating.

- Poster or bulletin board—one for 'Rights' and one for 'Responsibilities.'

## INSTRUCTIONS:

- Place the hands in the centre of the room, either on the ground or in a container.
- Have each participant take a turn picking out a hand (reminder: it does not have to be their own!).
- Have the participant read out what is written on it and then stick the hand on the appropriate poster or bulletin board. Encourage the group to discuss and help each other throughout.

## DEBRIEF:

- *Feel:* Did you enjoy the activity? What was the hardest part? The easiest?
- *Think:* How do you tell the difference between rights and responsibilities? Do we all have rights? Responsibilities?
- *Act:* What can we do together to help make sure that we act responsibly in our group? Example: standing up for someone being bullied.

Adapted from the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Human Rights Activities Grades K-2

## ACTIVITY 02: DISCUSSION



### ABOUT THIS SESSION:

Participants practice their communication and critical thinking skills using the book, *Letters to a Prisoner* by Jacques Goldstyn.

**TIME NEEDED:** 15-20 Minutes

### OBJECTIVES:

- Apply understanding of human rights.
- Practice empathy.
- Improve communication and critical thinking skills.
- Practice literacy skills by writing a letter in support and solidarity with the characters in the book.

***“But how do I read a wordless children’s book?”***

Check out the [video](#) author Jacques Goldstyn made of himself reading the book, as an example. You can find it on Owlkids Books’ Youtube.

### PREPARATION AND RESOURCES:

- A copy of *Letters to a Prisoner* by Jacques Goldstyn.

### INTRODUCING THE BOOK:

As a group or in smaller circles, read *Letters to a Prisoner* together. Ideally, have the participants tell the story based on how they interpret each illustration.

A) Help the participants describe the images of the story. Ex) What is happening in each picture?

B) Prompt participants about feelings. Ex) How does the little girl feel? How does the father feel? How do the police feel? How do the pictures make *you* feel?

Ask for brief reactions from participants.

A) What is the story about? What was the author trying to say? (For advanced participants: Why did the author make a wordless story?)

Further discuss the story’s meaning together. Provide prompts such as:

A) What is the difference between right and wrong?

i) What feels wrong in this story?

ii) What feels right in this story?

iii) How do you feel when someone treats you wrongly?

B) Do all people deserve to be treated right?

i) What does ‘right’ mean to you? How do *all* people deserve to be treated?

## ACTIVITY 03: ACTION



### ABOUT THIS SESSION:

This is a letter-writing activity. Participants will practice using their voice to defend and empathize with others. This includes writing letters to the fictional and real-life individuals included in this kit.

**TIME NEEDED:** 45-60 Minutes

### OBJECTIVES:

- Promote empathy and solidarity.
- Motivate and empower participants to take action for human rights.
- Develop literacy and creative writing skills.

### PREPARATION AND RESOURCES:

Full case sheets, videos, and other resources are available here:

<https://amnesty.ca/write-for-rights/>

### OPTIONAL:

- Quotes on the impact of letters from Amnesty supporters page 13.
- If required, copies of the (simplified) UDHR on page 12.

# ACTIVITY 04: FROGGER!



## ABOUT THIS SESSION:

This game will encourage participants to feel and reflect on experiences of inclusion and exclusion to emphasize their rights to non-discrimination and protection from all forms of violence.

**TIME NEEDED:** 15-20 Minutes

## OBJECTIVES:

- Expand communication and teamwork skills.
- Improve literacy, communication, and teamwork skills.
- Practice cooperation and collaboration in order to achieve positive results.
- Reflect on responsibility and togetherness.

## PREPARATION AND RESOURCES:

- Create 'lily-lads' made out of large pieces of newspapers, paper plates, or decorations (be creative!)...enough for only half the number of participants.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

- Place the lily-pads on the ground of the play area. Ensure there are no obstacles in the way. If a student has special mobility needs, ensure there is one very large piece of paper available at all times, enough to accommodate their aids.
- Explain that each of the participants is a little frog. The specified play area is the pond where they live and the papers on the ground are lily-pads.

However, there's a hungry snapping turtle who also lives in the area, and he loves to eat little frogs!

- Whenever you shout: "Snapper!" all participants—the little froggers—must escape by standing on a lily-pad. Encourage them to work together. If they do not find space on a lily-pad, they will be eliminated from the activity. The activity continues until there is only one frog left and he/she is the winner.
- To begin the activity, ask participants to move around the play area, pretending to swim or to hop like little froggers. They must not walk on the lily-pads.
- When the instructor shouts "Snapper!" participants must find and stand on a lily-pad. When all the spots are filled and the danger has passed, students continue to move about.
- Tell participants that the lily-pads are getting old and limp and are starting to fall apart. Tear away part of each lily-pad to make the safe spaces smaller.
- Repeat the activity, making the lily-pads smaller and smaller, thus eliminating those who cannot find a spot.

## DEBRIEF:

- *Feel:* Did you enjoy the activity? Did someone make room for you on a lily-pad? How did that feel?
- *Think:* How did you help others during the activity? What else could you have done? Your group is like a very large lily-pad; it is a place where there is room for everyone. *Who is responsible for making sure it is a safe place for everyone?* Discuss this further.
- *Act:* What can we do together to include others when we play? In every day life? What can each of us do to make sure that everyone is our group feels safe and respected?

Adapted from the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Human Rights Activities Grades K-2



# ACTIVITY 05: REFLECTION



## ABOUT THIS SESSION:

This activity encourages participants to reflect on the session in relation to personal experience. It invites the group to plan future activism and to engage other people in the Write for Rights cause.

**TIME NEEDED:** 15-20 Minutes

## OBJECTIVES:

- Develop critical thinking skills.
- Develop skills of effective communication and messaging.
- Develop a basic understanding of how activism works.

## PREPARATION AND RESOURCES:

- A copy of *Letters to a Prisoner*, for reference.

Encourage participants to use their voice to say what is right and wrong – act in solidarity for human rights and their defenders!

“You are now a Human Rights Activist!”

## EXPLORING THE CONTENT

Use the information from page 13 to tell participants about some of the success stories in past Write for Rights campaigns. Explain that these successes are mainly a result of the very large number of people who spoke up – and wrote for rights.

## REFLECTING ON ACTIVISM

Talk about the importance of speaking up for yourself and others.

- A) How do you feel when you cannot speak for yourself? For people you love and care about?
- B) Do you think the man in the story was scared? Was his daughter scared? Do you think what they each did was brave? Courageous? Is it possible to be both scared and brave at the same time?
- C) Why is it important to speak up when someone—especially authority figures—are treating others wrongly?
- D) Would *you* help someone who could not help themselves? Would *you* use your voice to defend those who have had their voice taken from them? How have you done this already?
- E) Together, make a plan to continue your class’ activism, whether it be in the classroom, the community at large, or at home!

# THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following the Second World War. Since 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world is bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of the document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name states, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world that they will abide by certain basic standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Since its adoption, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up on the basis of its principles. It is these laws and agreements which allow organizations like Amnesty International to call on Governments to not engage in the types of behaviour or treatment that the people mentioned in these cases have experienced: human rights have become part of international law.

Human rights protect individuals, and they create obligations for governments or state officials. They can be seen as laws for governments. They are designed to ensure that every human being, whatever their gender or gender identity, nationality, ethnic identity, or religious orientations; however rich or poor, young or old, abled or disabled; whatever their beliefs; however qualified or skilled they are—that all these human beings should be treated with respect for their humanity and dignity. No one should have to suffer indignity or harm; no-one should be treated as a lesser human being than anyone else.

The UDHR is a declaration of intent by every Government around the world that they will abide by certain basic standards in the treatment of individual human beings.



**Rights:**

- I have the right to be treated with respect
- I have the right to be safe within my family, community, and country
- I have the right to express my ideas
- I have the right to a name and nationality
- I have the right to be treated equally, regardless of my age, the colour of my skin, my sex and gender, my religion, my opinions, my nationality, or my culture
- I have the right to receive the absolute best standard of health and to be taken care of when I am ill or injured
- I have the right to go to school
- I have the right to be protected against abuse, violence, torture, and war
- I have the right to practice my religion
- I have the right to be alive
- I have the right to be protected from child labour
- I have the right to a clean environment
- I have the right to own possessions
- I have the right to a good home
- If I have a physical or intellectual disability, I have the right to special care
- I have the right to a good standard of living
- I have the right to understanding and love from my parents and society
- I have the right to play and to rest
- I have the right to have friends
- I have the right to be wrong and make mistakes
- I have the right to be who I am

**Responsibilities:**

- I respect others, whether they are children or adults
- I respect the ideas of others, even if I do not agree with them
- I take care of my body so that it can be healthy
- I respect my commitments
- I take care of my possessions
- I respect people who are different from me
- I help others
- I cooperate with my parents, teachers, and adults who take care of me
- I am welcoming to those who are from a different culture or background than I am
- I am careful and I play safely
- I am not violent

# UNOFFICIAL SUMMARY OF ARTICLES IN THE UDHR

1.	Freedom and equality in dignity and rights
2.	Non-discrimination
3.	Right to life, liberty and security of person
4.	Freedom from slavery
5.	Freedom from torture
6.	Protected by the law
7.	Equal before the law
8.	A remedy when rights have been violated
9.	No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile
10.	Right to a fair trial
11.	Innocent until proven guilty
12.	Privacy and the right to home and family life
13.	Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders
14.	Right to marry and start a family
15.	Right to go to another country and ask for protection
16.	Right to a nationality
17.	Right to own property and possessions
18.	Freedom of belief (including religious belief)
19.	Freedom of expression and the right to spread information
20.	Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way
21.	Right to take part in the government of your country
22.	Right to social security
23.	Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union
24.	Right to rest and leisure
25.	Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being
26.	Right to education, including free primary education
27.	Right to share in your community's cultural life
28.	Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized
29.	Responsibility to respect the rights of others
30.	No taking away any of these rights!



## CIVIL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES

Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, freedom of expression and religious belief, right to non-discrimination.



## LEGAL RIGHTS

Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.



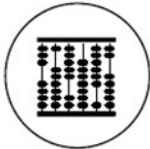
## SOCIAL RIGHTS

Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.



## POLITICAL RIGHTS

Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly.



## ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.

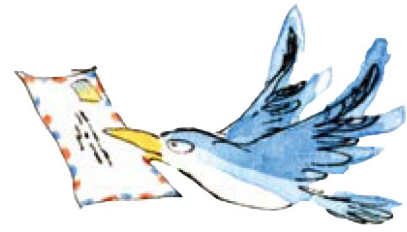


## CULTURAL RIGHTS, SOLIDARITY RIGHTS

Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.

# SUCCESS STORIES

The quotes on this page are all taken from people who have received letters from around the globe as a result of Write for Rights.



"Write for Rights is one of the most important campaigns in the world, and because we don't live in a perfect world, it should and must go on. It's wonderful! I am so moved, and I thank you from the depth of my heart."

*Costas (Greece)*

"The support is not only for my sister, but also for us as a family. We are happy and very thankful for you... Thank you so much. We are so thankful to you for the support that you are providing us. We know that one day, God willing, with your support my sister will be free."

*Cecilia Vásquez Sánchez, sister of Teodora del Carmen Vásquez (El Salvador)*

"People have sent inspiring letters, supportive letters, letters about lovely animals, letters about their beautiful countries, letters about their beautiful and cute pets, and some lovely poems. Your letters are not just letters, they are also big presents and great strength not only for the students but also for Burma's future."

*Phyoe Phyoe Aung (Myanmar)*

"I am very happy because so many people around the world thought of people like us."

*Roseline, a girl living in Tema Bokin Shelter (Burkina Faso)*

"Amnesty International members and activists are my heroes. I want to assure them that this great effort they have shown to me will not be in vain. I promise to be a human rights activist - to fight for others."

*Moses Akatugba (Nigeria)*

"I'm staying strong because of you."

*Chelsea Manning (USA)*

## WHAT'S NEXT?

- Take some **photos of your workshop** and send them to [youth@amnesty.ca](mailto:youth@amnesty.ca) – we'd love to see more youth learning about human rights!  
**Let us know how it went!** Did this guide help support you in your activities? How can we make this guide better for next year? Please let us know your thoughts.
- **Start a Youth & Student Club or Community Group!** We have a great how-to kit that will get you up and running. Just email us and we will help get you on your way.
- Sign yourself and your participants up for **Urgent Actions** – actions for activists who want to take action on a current Amnesty International letter-writing case. Email [urgentaction@amnesty.ca](mailto:urgentaction@amnesty.ca) for more details.
- Sign up to our Youth and Student program **e-newsletter** by emailing [youth@amnesty.ca](mailto:youth@amnesty.ca) Get all the latest actions, news and opportunities delivered directly to your in-box!
- Keep up to date with Owlkids and Amnesty International Canada's human rights campaigns and actions by following us on **social media**:

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Illustrations from Letters to a Prisoner by Jacques Goldstyn (Owlkids Books, 2017)