

Active citizenship: learning resources for topical issues

10. 'Let freedom ring' – civil rights, human rights and the power of protest



Introduction for staff

The 40th anniversary in 2008 of the assassination of Martin Luther King is an ideal opportunity to discuss with students the principles of civil rights and protest. King worked with many individuals and small groups of people to change the conditions of black Americans during the 50s and 60s in the southern states of the USA. In the democratic countries of the world today, the kinds of segregation that existed at that time in the USA, and indeed in many other countries, seem alien and unacceptable. However, discrimination of all kinds still exists in the USA, in our own country and across the world, and people still fight against injustice.

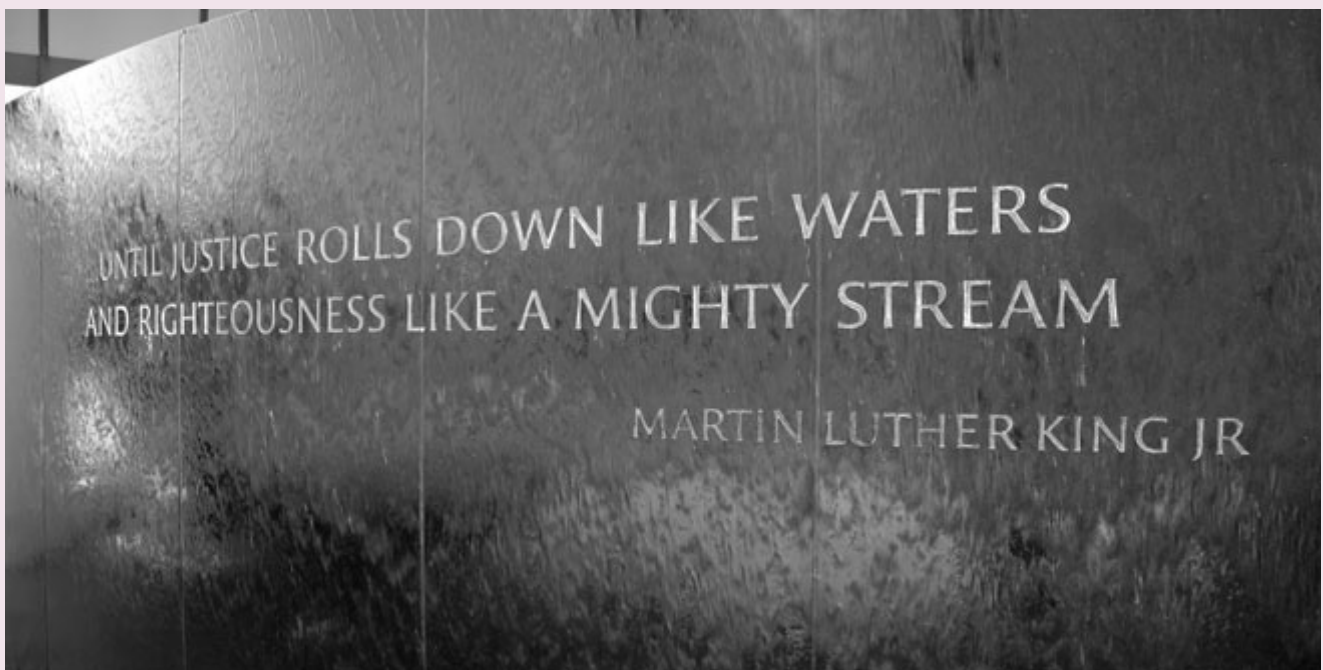
The kinds of civil rights that people were fighting for during this time are those supported by law and afforded by nations to those living within their borders. However, during the second half of the twentieth century, countries began to recognise the importance of universal human rights – i.e. rights that all governments in the world should respect and protect, and which all humans should expect to receive wherever, and however, they live. In a time of increasing globalisation, all peoples of the world need the protection of a Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Citizenship learning opportunities

Citizenship education aims to develop understanding of the past, particularly in relation to things that need changing today. Many history students study the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America, and this can provide an opportunity for them to consider the implications of social injustice, the strategies that can be effective in fighting injustice, and on-going efforts to make our own and other societies fairer.

As part of citizenship education, young people should discuss these controversial and sensitive issues so that they can come to considered opinions on whether action needs to be taken, and what kind of action is effective.

The materials provide activities that enable these discussions to take place. They are aimed at levels 2/3 and help to meet learning objectives identified in *Play your part: post-16 citizenship* QCA guidance (QCA, 2004). A study of civil rights, human rights, protest and social justice can be used to illustrate the key concepts of democracy, justice, rights, responsibilities, identities and diversity in the programme of study for key stage 4 citizenship (from September 2008).



Suggestions for using the materials

- ‘Martin Luther King and the struggle for civil rights’ provides an introduction to the Civil Rights Movement of the fifties and sixties in the USA. It is important to point out that groups of young people were involved in the protests and achieved a great deal of success. The sheet should be used as a stimulus to identify young people’s own concerns about specific forms of injustice. You could use a ‘paper carousel’ format in which the group is split into three smaller groups. Each small group is given a flip chart page with one of the three discussion questions written on the top. The group has five minutes to write an answer to the question before passing the page to the next group who should add their own views. When each group has answered each question, discuss all the views in a plenary.
- ‘Social injustice today’ introduces the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to which many countries have signed up. Despite this, human rights abuses still continue. Five case studies are provided to illustrate a range of abuses. Students should work in groups to discuss each case study and to decide which of the rights in the Universal Declaration are being violated. There are many other examples on the internet, and students could find more. They should discuss the principle of universal human rights using the questions provided.
- ‘Protest!’ is designed to make students aware of the different kinds of protest that are often used. You could give each group in the class a different type of protest to discuss and research; or you could ask small groups to discuss each of them. It is important to raise the issue of legality. In authoritarian regimes, most of the protest actions described will be illegal. In democracies, they only become illegal if violence is used, or the activities are carried out in forbidden places or by proscribed groups. These issues are worth exploring in more detail.
- ‘Protest songs’ draws on the success of ‘We shall overcome’ – the song that became the anthem of the civil rights movement – to encourage students to write their own protest song. You can use *Get up, stand up – citizenship through music* for more ideas. It is available free from the Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme (see ‘Resources’ at the end of this booklet).
- ‘How can we best advance the cause?’ enables young people to consider the arguments for and against non-violence. The eight strategies listed provide commonly expressed views, which can be used as a stimulus for a debate.
- ‘New media’ raises for discussion the advantages and disadvantages of the new media of the internet, mobile phone and mobile cameras as tools of protest. Televised news footage of the brutal reaction of police to civil rights demonstrations helped to forward their cause. Young people are encouraged to use their own technology to put a case against an injustice that concerns them.



Martin Luther King and the struggle for civil rights

Forty years ago, on 4 April 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot dead on a balcony in Memphis. He was preparing to lead a march of sanitation workers in a protest against low wages and poor working conditions. Martin Luther King studied theology and became pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. He was a strong worker for civil rights and eventually led the emerging civil rights movement, which was made up of many groups of people – old and young.

During the fifties and sixties, black people had few rights in the southern states of the USA. Many protesting groups began to challenge this. For example, education was segregated until the law was changed by a Supreme Court decision in 1954. However, black students continued to be barred from white schools despite their protests. The Little Rock Nine, as they later came to be called, were the first black teenagers to attend the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. These brave young black students challenged segregation in the deep South and won, although they suffered taunts, insults and death threats.

In 1955, Rosa Parks, a black woman, was on trial for refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a segregated bus. Thousands of black people started a bus boycott, which was intended to last one day – the day of her trial – but continued for over a year. 42,000 black residents of Montgomery shared cars, took taxis and walked the hostile streets rather than use the buses. The boycott resulted in the Supreme Court of the United States declaring that segregated seating on buses was unconstitutional. In 1960 students staged a sit-in at the Greensboro Woolworth's lunch counter because of the store's policy of not serving black customers. The students once again suffered racist taunts and violence, but forced the counter to close early. This prompted a wave of similar episodes across the South that forced major stores to change their policies on segregated facilities.



© Don Cravens/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

King led many civil rights marches across the country while always advocating non-violence. President Kennedy proposed a civil rights bill in 1963, and King took part in the march in Washington to support the bill, although many in government wanted the march cancelled. It was at this demonstration, on 28 August 1963, that King made his famous 'I have a dream' speech. After Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, his successor, President Johnson, pushed through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

While remembering the struggle of Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and the thousands of other civil rights protesters, we should look at our world today and consider how people still protest against social injustice and the effectiveness of the methods they use in our own society and in others.

What injustices still exist in the world today?

Which three injustices concern you most?

What forms of protest are often used to fight injustice?

Social injustice today

In the USA in the sixties, the Civil Rights Movement was fighting racial segregation in restaurants, bars, schools and on public transport; unequal treatment at the hands of the justice system, including police brutality; low pay and bad conditions at work; and the right to vote.

Civil rights are rights, supported by laws, that nations give to those people who live within their territorial boundaries. However, following the atrocities of the Second World War, it began to be recognised that all people should have rights wherever they live just because they are human beings. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which lists 30 articles, lays down these basic human rights. Many countries in the world today have signed up to The Universal Declaration which is based on the fundamental principle that all humans are equal, and should be treated with dignity and respect.

The Declaration forbids

- torture and inhuman or degrading treatment, slavery or involuntary servitude, arbitrary arrest and detention, and debtor's prisons
- propaganda advocating either war or hatred based on race, religion, national origin, or language
- discrimination based on race, sex, colour, national origin, or language

It guarantees

- the right of people to choose freely whom they will marry and to found a family, and requires that the duties and obligations of marriage and family be shared equally between partners
- people condemned to the death penalty the right to appeal for a lesser penalty, and restricts the death penalty to the most serious crimes
- the rights of children and forbids the death penalty entirely for people under 18 years of age

It states that all individuals should be given the right to

- life
- liberty and freedom of movement
- equality before the law
- presumption of innocence till proven guilty
- appeal a conviction
- be recognised as a person before the law
- privacy and protection of that privacy by law
- freedom of thought, conscience, and religion
- freedom of opinion and expression
- freedom of assembly and association
- legal recourse when their rights have been violated, even if the violator was acting in an official capacity

www.hrweb.org/legal/undocs.html

Look at the five case studies (on pages 6–7) and decide, in each case, which of the rights laid down in the Universal Declaration is being denied to the person concerned.

Student activist Thet Win Aung

Thet Win Aung, a student and human rights activist, is serving a 59-year prison sentence in Myanmar (Burma) on politically motivated charges. Amnesty International has received reports that Thet Win Aung is in very poor health, suffering from a range of illnesses including malaria. He was arrested on 4 October 1998 for participating in peaceful demonstrations protesting against the poor quality of education and human rights in Myanmar. Military authorities reportedly tortured him during interrogation. His original sentence of 52 years in prison was later increased to 59 years.

As a member state of the United Nations, Myanmar must uphold all of the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Amnesty International considers Thet Win Aung to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising his fundamental right to freedom of expression. Amnesty International is campaigning for the Burmese authorities to grant the immediate and unconditional release of Thet Win Aung and all prisoners of conscience in Myanmar.

Amnesty International www.amnesty.org

David Hicks, Australian held in Guantánamo Bay

David Hicks, a former horse trainer from Adelaide, South Australia, converted to Islam after training with the Kosovo Liberation Army. He travelled to Pakistan to study in a madrassa, an Islamic school. He telephoned his father after the 9/11 attacks in the USA to say that he was going to help the Taliban defend Kabul against the Northern Alliance (Afghan warlords). He was captured on 9 December 2001 by the Northern Alliance, who ill-treated him and then handed him to the US authorities. He was transported to Guantánamo Bay in January 2002 and has consistently claimed that he was tortured by sleep deprivation, beatings, and being forced to take medication.

Communication with his family has been restricted and he was not able to speak to a lawyer until December 2003. He has been charged with 'conspiracy to commit war crimes', 'attempted murder by an underprivileged belligerent' and 'aiding the enemy' but has not yet faced a trial. He pleaded not guilty to all charges when he was brought before a military tribunal. Arguments about whether he is or is not a prisoner of war has put Hicks, along with other detainees, in legal limbo.

Adapted from Amnesty International <http://news.amnesty.org/pages/torture-case-eng>

Mila, a child domestic in the Phillipines

Mila's experience is typical of the many child domestics in the Phillipines. She is now 23 years old, and started work as a child domestic at the age of nine. 'During my time as a child domestic I worked for 11 employers. Only one of them gave me any salary, and that was just 500 pesos (US\$9.00) a month,' Mila says.

Each day she had to get up at 5.00am to carry out household chores such as taking care of her employers' children, cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry and ironing. On top of this, her employers gave her additional work including helping out in a pre-school, making deliveries, and in one case, looking after pigs.

Conditions were bad. 'In one place I lived in a shed, with no light, no mattress, and only one bucket of water a week for washing.' On two occasions she was sexually assaulted, once when she was 12 by her employer, a 70-year-old man, and then when she was 15 by the brother of her then employer. After that, she ran away and found shelter with Visayan Forum (a Charity working in the Phillipines).

Anti-Slavery International www.antislavery.org/homepage/antislavery/award/cdwphilippines2005.htm

Christian convert Ahmed

Ahmed is an Iraqi Kurdish man from Kirkuk, now living in the UK, who applied for asylum in mid-1999. After his asylum claim was refused and his appeal dismissed, his financial support and accommodation were stopped in October 2005. He currently lives in a caravan with no sanitary facilities, provided by his church, which also provides food. Friends from his community help him but he struggles to survive with no money and no prospect of being able to work.

Since his asylum claim and appeal were dismissed, he lives in fear of being returned to Iraq, particularly since August 2005 when some Iraqi Kurds were taken into detention before being forcibly removed to Iraq in November 2005. Ahmed witnessed much violence in Iraq and has nightmares because of the situation there. He talked of 'honour' killings in the Kurdish area of Iraq. His relatives in Iraq broke contact with him when he converted to Christianity and he 'had problems with Islamists' due to his change of religion.

He chose to come to UK because it is democratic and free. During the asylum process he had four different lawyers. The first used an interpreter who was a Kurd from Iran. At his asylum interview at the Home Office, he was frightened to speak openly and did not mention that he had converted to Christianity as his lawyer sent a clerk with him, whom he had never met and who he believed was a Muslim from Pakistan.

Amnesty UK www.amnesty.org.uk

A Latvian woman in the UK

In her early 20s she arrived in London on her own initiative, leaving her young children behind. She was recruited by an employment agency for a £100 fee. They moved her to Hull, taking her passport, ostensibly to send to the Home Office for registration. After four months she hadn't received her passport back (it had not been sent off). This later affected her benefit status and, without it, she felt unable to leave the agency. She regularly worked 16-hour shifts in factories, under threat of losing her job and accommodation if she refused. Overtime was never paid. She was transported to work double shifts in Barnsley, sleeping in a car between shifts. Spurious deductions for 'administration charges' and 'transport costs' were the norm and there was evidence of systematic theft through the deliberate miscalculation of wages. Sometimes migrants worked two shifts only to be paid for one. Her protestations were met with threats of dismissal.

She was placed in a bedroom with two men she did not know. Her general mood was 'Terrible. Having to live in a room with two men. You can't dress. You can't do anything.' She didn't know where to go to for advice, her English wasn't strong and she had no friends. She described herself as 'trapped.'

Joseph Rowntree Foundation www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/2035.asp

Discuss the following questions:

- Is it necessary to have a Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
- Why is there debate about whether the human rights of all people should be protected?
- Can you think of any examples of people's rights conflicting?

Protest!

The Civil Rights Movement used a wide range of forms of protest: boycotts, strikes, sit-ins, marches and songs. Freedom of opinion and expression, which often means protest, is an important human right, but even today not all countries support it.

- Think of examples of each of the forms of protest listed below.
- What makes each of these forms of protest effective?
- In what situations might each be illegal?
- What other kinds of protest are there?



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Boycotts of goods and services – i.e. refusal to buy certain products, use services or pay taxes or rents because of disapproval about policies

Strikes and go-slow actions at work, usually to improve pay or working conditions

Demonstrations e.g. sit-ins, marches, political rallies, picketing, stunts – used to draw attention to a cause

Written protest e.g. petitions, letter-writing and postcard campaigns – used to put pressure on people in power and to force a change

Performance e.g. satire, comedy, theatre, songs – used to criticise those in power and to convince others of the need for change



Protest songs

Imagine a scene in a city in America's deep South in the mid 60s. It is a hot, sunny day and the streets are filled with people carrying placards. They are black, white, workers and students, their arms are linked, and they are singing 'We Shall Overcome'. Singing in unity, they march through the city, demanding racial equality and freedom. The song became the anthem of the civil rights movement, and helped to create a mood for change in the USA.

1. We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome some day

CHORUS:
Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome some day

Protest songs have a long history. They are used to promote a cause and to persuade others to join the cause. You can listen to extracts from some other famous protest songs on a website called '20 Protest Songs that Matter' www.spinner.com/2007/07/13/20-protest-songs-that-mattered-no-20

Can you write a protest song? If so, what injustice would you write about? Use the 'Citizenship concept cards' below to help you decide on a theme and work in pairs to write a couple of verses. You could set the words to a well-known tune, or use a backing track if you decide to write a rap.

Use *Get up, stand up – Citizenship through music* for useful advice, backing tracks and recording of four protest songs ('NPWA' by Billy Bragg, 'All You Fascists Bound to Lose' by Woody Guthrie and Billy Bragg, 'Redemption Song' by Bob Marley and the Wailers, and 'Exodus' by Bob Marley and the Wailers.)

<p>Democracy and autocracy</p> <p>How free are we to choose our government?</p> <p>Do we have freedom of speech or not?</p> <p>Can we be arrested and imprisoned without trial?</p>	<p>Cooperation and conflict</p> <p>Why do people disagree and fight?</p> <p>How can conflict be resolved?</p> <p>How can people best work together?</p>	<p>Equality and diversity</p> <p>Are people treated equally?</p> <p>How do people differ – language, religion, culture, beliefs?</p> <p>What are the implications of prejudice and discrimination?</p>
<p>Law and human rights</p> <p>What are universal human rights?</p> <p>Is everyone treated in accordance with human rights?</p> <p>How do human rights affect our laws?</p>	<p>Fairness, justice and the law</p> <p>What does the law say about different behaviour?</p> <p>What do the police, courts and prisons do?</p> <p>How are people treated when they are arrested and tried?</p>	<p>Freedom and order</p> <p>How do governments keep order?</p> <p>Do we have total freedom, or need we obey laws?</p> <p>What do we mean by freedom?</p>
<p>Individual and community</p> <p>What makes us who we are and gives us our identities?</p> <p>Which cultures make up our country and our communities?</p> <p>How do communities work together?</p>	<p>Power and authority</p> <p>Who has power to force us to behave in certain ways, and who has authority that we choose to obey?</p> <p>How are power and authority used in organisations, communities and governments?</p>	<p>Rights and responsibilities</p> <p>How should we behave towards each other?</p> <p>What responsibility do people have to ensure that everyone has rights?</p>

How can we best advance the cause?

Martin Luther King always insisted that protest should be non-violent. He was a Christian pastor and he used the power of the churches to persuade people of the rightness of his cause. The motto of his organisation (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference) was ‘not one hair of one head of one person should be harmed.’ However, not everyone at the time agreed with him. Malcolm X, the black power leader, who was also a pastor, preached about separation for blacks and whites. He saw revolution as the only path and believed that non-violence was a strategy that would not bring about real change for blacks. Many people today still believe that violence is more successful than non-violence. The debate about different ways to advance the Civil Rights cause is explored in the following role-play activity.



- **In groups, imagine that you are young and committed Civil Rights activists, worried that the Movement was not achieving the results that you hoped for.**
- **Choose one of the alternative ‘strategies’ listed below and discuss with the other members of your group the advantages and disadvantages of adopting this way forward.**
- **You will be expected to feed back the main points of your discussion to the rest of the group, making clear whether or not you would advise that this strategy be adopted.**

Strategies

- 1 ‘I think we should appeal to the courts. After all, the United States is a country which is supposed to be governed by laws’
- 2 ‘Why don’t we appeal to the good white people out there? After all, the racists are only a small minority of the population, and in the South there are lots of respectable white people to whom we could appeal for support’
- 3 ‘The only real choice we have is to rise up in armed revolt to protect ourselves’
- 4 ‘Why don’t we organise ourselves and elect black people to Congress (the American “Parliament”) where they can pass laws to protect us?’
- 5 ‘Lets keep our heads down and work hard and then the whites will at least leave us alone’
- 6 ‘The media is really powerful in the US, so lets make use of it to publicise our cause’
- 7 ‘Lets continue with our current strategy of non-violence. In the end, the whites will be convinced of the justice of our cause, and grant us our rights’
- 8 ‘We are focusing on the wrong targets by going after educational and even legal rights. What really counts is more equality with whites in relation to jobs and incomes, and that should be our main priority’

Plenary

Firstly, listen to and discuss feedback on each strategy from the group discussions.

Secondly, to what extent do you feel that, in a democratic society, the use of non-peaceful action can be justified? You can use other events or protest movements as evidence to support your argument.

New Media

Who controls the media?

Televised news footage of the brutal reaction of police to demonstrations helped to forward the cause of civil rights activists in 50s and 60s America. The first action of an anti-democratic government is to take control of the media – radio, television and the newspapers – because to control information is to control people's opinions. But the world is changing, as many authoritarian governments are finding out to their cost. The internet and mobile phones allow news stories to get out. For example, the recent disturbances in Myanmar (Burma) have been shown all over the world, even though Western journalists are barred. People living in the country have been able to beam video from their mobile phones to television stations, via the internet.

Myanmar Blocks Internet, Cuts Off Phones

Friday September 28, 2007 5:46 PM

By MICK ELMORE

Associated Press Writer BANGKOK, Thailand (AP) – As soldiers in Myanmar intensified their crackdown on pro-democracy protesters Friday, authorities also went after the Internet and mobile phones that have proven so vital and powerful in documenting the dramatic confrontations. The Internet has played a crucial role in the flow of information out of the reclusive Southeast Asian nation where few foreign journalists are permitted to operate and media freedom is severely restricted. For days, the world has been watching television and still images smuggled out of the over the Internet, and many journalism and dissident Websites and blogs are packed with images and links to more video and photos of the crackdown under way. The images have drawn global condemnation of the ruling junta. Myanmar has been enflamed by protests against 45 years of repressive military rule. Security forces have killed at least 10 people in the past few days, arrested hundreds and sealed off hotbeds of dissent in Yangon and other urban centres. Exile groups and at least one western diplomat have said the actual death toll could be much higher.

www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/story/0,-6956641,00.html

Citizen journalism

The internet is also used by many people as a platform for their political views. Instead of writing letters to a Member of Parliament, or demonstrating in the street, someone with a strong view can express their feelings on a blog or via YouTube. Some people call this 'the age of citizen journalism'.

There are advantages and disadvantages to this new freedom. While being democratic, it is a technique also open to abuse – people feel that the internet gives them anonymity and they can write things that are untrue, ignorant, libellous or prejudiced.

Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the use of the new media as a form of social protest. Devise a blog or video package to post on the internet giving your view of a social injustice and what you think should be done about it. The issue can be local, national or global.

Resources

Three free resources from the Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme

Get up, stand up – citizenship through music

The activities in this pack take young people through the stages involved in developing songs or raps on citizenship themes. The attached CD-Rom provides backing tracks and recordings of protest songs as a stimulus for discussion.

Agree to disagree – citizenship and controversial issues

This staff development booklet can also be used to train young people in dealing with discussions and debates on controversial issues. It provides six activities which aim at developing skill and confidence.

Choosing an angle – citizenship through video production

The activities in this pack were, in part, developed while working with a group of young consultants to produce a DVD promoting post-16 citizenship to young people. Video is an effective medium for young people to express their views and, through involvement in a production process, they are able to learn more about putting forward a case or argument.

All three resources are available to order free from The Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme website:
www.post16citizenship.org/publications

ABC: Teaching Human Rights – practical activities for primary and secondary schools

Produced by the United Nations in 2003, this downloadable booklet provides a wide range of activities and includes, in the appendix, the full text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/abc_text.pdf

‘I have a dream’ – speech of Martin Luther King

Listen to the speech and read full written text.

www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm

Learning about Human Rights through Citizenship

From Amnesty International. Five photocopiable interactive human rights lessons on refugees and asylum, torture, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the arms trade, and running campaigns. Plus sections on other available resources and on getting more involved in Amnesty's work. Telephone 07033 1596 quoting product code YA278 + delivery address, or visit

www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=301

Teachers' TV – Human Rights with Cherie Booth QC

This series of three half-hour programmes looks at Human Rights teaching. In the series, Cherie Booth works with a group of teachers and their pupils on Human Rights issues. The programme features Cherie Booth, teachers and pupils as they grapple with some of the more challenging aspects of teaching Human Rights and develop lessons that make Human Rights and the law relevant and accessible to learners. The programmes are available for downloading from the website – just register (free) on the TTV website and follow the instructions.

Lesson plans and resources are also available on the Teachers' TV website. The programmes are 'Balancing Rights', 'Making Rights Relevant' and 'Parliament and the Law'. Aimed at key stage 3, but also suitable for level 2

www.teachers.tv/search/node/human+rights