

CONTENT LEVEL

Ages 14-18 (Grades 9-12)

TIME

60 Minutes

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

Students will...

- Write about personal values and identity
- Discuss freedom of religion and its importance
- Analyze real-world case studies about restrictions on freedom of religion

Accompanying slides available via [Google Slides](#)

INTRODUCTION TO THE UDHR

Woven Teaching believes that **human rights education** is essential for students to understand and assert their own rights and to protect the rights of others. As a result, the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR) lies at the core of Woven Teaching's materials. The document's 30 articles outline fundamental human rights: basic rights and freedoms which every human being is entitled to, regardless of the person's race, religion, birthplace, gender, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. Although its articles are not legally binding, the UDHR serves as the moral compass for the international community.

ARTICLE 18

Freedom of Thought, Religion, and Belief

You have the right to practice your religion freely, to change it, and to practice it either on your own or with other people.

Article 18 of the UDHR outlines the right to freedom of thought, religion, and belief. You can learn more about Article 18 at bit.ly/WT-udhr-18.

A lesson about Article 18 has many applications in the classroom. For example, it could be added to units about:

- Genocides with an element of religious targeting (the Holocaust, Uighur, Bosnian, Rohingya, etc.)
- Religious persecution and the founding of the U.S.
- Post-9/11 Islamophobia

Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not legally binding, the rights described in its articles can be found in international covenants and treaties which are legally binding. The right to freedom of thought, religion, and belief can be found in Article 18 of the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1966. The United States is a State Party to the ICCPR; under international law, the U.S. must abide by its articles.

WHAT IS FREEDOM OF RELIGION? 15 MINUTES

Students will consider their own values and the importance of freedom of religion.

A. As students settle in, ask them to respond to the following prompt in their journals:

A value is a belief that someone has, usually about what is right/wrong or important in life. What are some values that you hold? What do they add to your sense of identity?

B. Give students a few minutes to write, then discuss as a class. After a few students have shared their thoughts, explain that many people's values (though certainly not all) come from their religious beliefs. As a result, religion can be a very important factor in the lives of many people.

C. Ask for a volunteer to read UDHR Article 18:

You have the right to practice your religion freely, to change it, and to practice it either on your own or with other people.

D. In pairs, ask students to spend a few minutes answering the following questions:

1. What does freedom of religion mean?
2. Do you think that freedom of religion is important? Why or why not?
3. Does your country have freedom of religion? Please explain.

E. After a few minutes, ask some of the pairs to share takeaways from their discussion with the group. Remind students that freedom of religion is not only in the UDHR, but is also a legally binding article in the International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights, as well as the U.S. Constitution.

ARTICLE 18 AROUND THE WORLD 35 MINUTES

Students will analyze a real-world case study related to freedom of religion.

A. Distribute both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (**Handout A**) and the Around the World Case Studies (**Handout B**) to each student. Ask students to spend a few minutes reviewing the UDHR, and then another few minutes writing a brief argument explaining how each case violates the right to freedom of religion. This activity can be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

B. After 25 minutes have passed (or most students have finished), bring the class together and debrief. Ask for volunteers to provide a brief overview of each case study. Then, ask students to share how each case violates Article 18. Finally, lead a discussion on the interconnectedness of rights—How does the violation of one right affect other rights? Can students think of other situations where the violation of one right triggers the violation of another?

Note: In all three case studies, the violation of Article 18 also violates Article 26 (the right to education). Encourage students to think of other rights that may be affected by the violation of Article 18.

CLOSING

10 MINUTES

Students will reflect on actions that they can take in their community to protect the rights enshrined in Article 18.

- A. Before distributing the exit cards, ask students to brainstorm ways that ordinary people can become involved in protecting the right to freedom of religion. Write their responses on the board.
- B. Provide each student with an “exit card” and ask them to answer at least two of the following questions. Remind them to be specific:
 - What is one thing that you learned today?
 - What is one action that you can take today to promote this right in your community?
 - What are some of the challenges you might face in promoting this right and how can you overcome them?

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

30 articles of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – Student Version

You have the right...

1. to be free and equal in dignity and in rights
2. to be free from all forms of discrimination
3. to live freely and safely
4. to be free from slavery
5. to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment
6. to be legally protected in the same way as everyone else
7. to be treated fairly under the law
8. to seek justice and remedy (repair) when your rights have been violated
9. to be free from arbitrary arrest, detention, and exile
10. to a fair and public trial if you are accused of a crime
11. to be presumed innocent until proven guilty if charged with a crime
12. to privacy
13. to choose where you live and to leave your country and to return
14. to seek asylum in another country if you are being persecuted
15. to be a citizen of your country
16. to get married and start a family (as a consenting adult)
17. to own property alone or with other people
18. to practice your religion freely and to change it
19. to think and say what you like and to share information with other people
20. to participate in and organize peaceful protests and meetings
21. to participate in your country's government by voting or being elected to office
22. to social security (to have your basic needs met)
23. to work, receive a fair wage, and to join a union
24. to rest and relaxation
25. to an adequate standard of living, including food, housing, and medical care
26. to education
27. to your culture and the right to benefit from scientific advancements
28. to live in the kind of society and world where your rights are respected
29. to be supported by your community and a duty to do the same for others
30. *Nothing in the UDHR implied that any person, group, or State can take away your human rights.*

AROUND THE WORLD CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY #1: FRANCE'S HIJAB BAN

In 2004, the French government passed legislation banning the display of noticeable religious symbols in public schools. This includes headscarves for Muslims, turbans for Sikhs, yarmulkes for Jewish people, and large crucifixes for Christians (although no specific items or symbols are mentioned in the law).

Many believe that the law disproportionately affects Muslims, as some Muslims believe that wearing a headscarf is a critical part of practicing the religion. In the decades since the law was passed, many girls who have worn a hijab to school have been suspended or expelled, or have stopped attending public school altogether.



How is UDHR Article 18 (freedom of religion) being violated in this case?

CASE STUDY #2: TEACHING INTELLIGENT DESIGN IN WEST VIRGINIA, USA

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits the government from establishing a religion. Therefore, it is illegal for a state institution such as a public school to promote any specific religion.

In early 2023, lawmakers in West Virginia tried to pass SB 619, a bill which would allow public schools to teach intelligent design. Intelligent design is a theory which states that the world is too complex to be explained by evolution alone, so a "Creator" must have designed it. Opponents of SB 619 argued that teaching creationism in public schools is unconstitutional because it is a form of religious education. The bill was defeated in March 2023.



How is UDHR Article 18 (freedom of religion) being violated in this case?

CASE STUDY #3: JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES IN INDONESIA

Maria Tunbonat is a 14-year-old from Indonesia. Although she does well in school, she has been in fifth grade for the past three years. Teachers at the public school she attends will not let her or her two younger siblings move on to the next grade because they are Jehovah’s Witnesses.

In Indonesia, all students must take religious courses, based on their religion. One of the country’s laws, however, only recognizes only six religions: Islam, Buddhism, Catholicism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Protestantism. As a result, students who do not practice these religions are often discriminated against in public schools.



How is UDHR Article 18 (freedom of religion) being violated in this case?

Human rights are interconnected and interdependent. When one right is violated, it often means that other rights are violated as well. How are other rights being violated in these case studies? Please explain.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

STUDENT VERSION

1 All human beings are born equal in dignity and in rights.	2 These rights belong to everyone . You should never be discriminated against.	3 You have the right to life, liberty, and safety .
4 No one can hold you in slavery .	5 No one can torture you or treat you in a cruel or degrading way.	6 Everyone has rights , no matter where they are.
7 Laws should be applied the same way for everyone.	8 You have the right to seek justice and remedy (repair) if your rights are not respected.	9 You cannot be imprisoned or thrown out of a country without a good reason.
10 You have the right to a fair and public trial .	11 You have the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty.	12 You have a right to privacy . No one can enter your home, read your mail, or bother you without good reason.
13 You have the right to move and travel within your country and internationally.	14 You have the right to seek protection from another country (asylum) if your country treats you poorly.	15 You have the right to be a citizen of a country (have a nationality).
16 Every consenting adult has the right to get married and have a family .	17 You have the right to own property .	18 You have the right to practice any religion .
19 You have the right to express your opinion .	20 You have the right to gather with others and protest publicly .	21 You have the right to participate in the government of your country (e.g. vote).
22 You have the right to have your basic needs met (e.g. through social security programs).	23 You have the right to work, to receive equal pay for equal work, and to join a union .	24 You have the right to rest from work .
25 You have the right to an adequate standard of living , including housing, food, and medical care.	26 You have the right to an education .	27 No one can stop you from participating in your community's cultural life .
28 Everyone must respect the social order that allows these rights to exist.	29 Everyone must respect the rights of others .	30 No one can take any of the rights in this declaration away from you.

The full text of the UDHR and a text-only student version are available at WovenTeaching.org/udhr