

# Social Sciences & human rights

See **Human rights and the New Zealand Curriculum**

“The social sciences learning area is about how societies work and how people can participate as critical, active, informed, and responsible citizens” (NZ Curriculum).

It can be argued that the development of the international human rights framework is humankind’s most significant attempt to agree how societies should work, and to define citizenship.

“Human rights is the only ideology that deserves to survive”

□ *Simon Wiesenthal*

Human rights is relevant to each of the conceptual strands for social studies:

## IDENTITY, CULTURE, AND ORGANISATION

The international human rights framework is an expression of global culture, providing agreed standards for social organisation and recognition of individual and collective identity.

## CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been described by eminent New Zealand jurist, Lord Cooke of Thorndon, as one of the most important events in human history. Struggles for human rights have defined revolutions and social movements that have helped shape the country and global society we live in.

Much of New Zealand’s history can be usefully viewed with a human rights lens:

- The Treaty of Waitangi can be seen as New Zealand’s Magna Carta – imperfect, but a significant human rights claim: citizenship equality in article 3, and protection of threatened economic, social and cultural rights in article 2.
- Parihaka represents a human rights struggle, and human rights violations, that had significance beyond New Zealand
- The extension of franchise to women was a landmark in the struggle for the right to participate in government
- The Government decision to fight for “human rights” in and after WW2 helped the development of an agreed ethical framework for the emerging global community
- The anti-Springbok Tour campaign helped define the human rights values New Zealanders sought to represent in the world.

## PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT

How people interact with their environment in pursuit of their human rights, such as the right to an adequate standard of living, and how the environment impacts on enjoyment of human rights are interesting themes to be explored.

## THE ECONOMIC WORLD

Human rights contextualises economic inquiry: economic activity is a key means of realising human rights such as the rights to work and an adequate standard of living, and human rights provides an ethical framework for economic activity.

### A KEY TOOL IN A SOCIAL INQUIRY APPROACH

As part of a social inquiry approach, the human rights framework guides key questions to be asked, information gathering, and examination of relevant current issues:

- What are the human rights issues involved? Whose?
- What human rights are people seeking to defend? Do their views run counter to others' human rights?

## RELEVANT TO KEY SOCIAL STUDIES UNDERSTANDINGS

A wide range of understandings that are Social Studies achievement objectives can be related to human rights:

- **People have social, cultural, and economic roles, rights, and responsibilities (level 2)**
- **Groups make and implement rules and laws (3)**
- **Cultural practices vary but reflect similar purposes (3)**

Governments have agreed that all children have human rights; these are spelled out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. What are they? How do they help children? What responsibilities can be said to go with them? How are they interpreted in different cultures?

- **People pass on and sustain culture and heritage for different reasons and that this has consequences for people (4)**
- **People participate individually and collectively in response to community challenges (4)**
- **People define and seek human rights (5)**
- **Understand how individuals, groups and institutions work to promote social justice and human rights (6)**

The international human rights framework is one of the most significant developments in global culture, and developed out of struggles for rights on all continents. It is a key normative framework guiding individual and organisational behaviour. What are some of the landmark struggles involved in claiming rights in Aotearoa? In other countries? How have/do they contributed to our understandings of human rights? How have/do people used human rights standards?

- **How systems of government in New Zealand operate and affect people's lives, and how they compare with another systems (5)**

New Zealand's system of government has developed out of successive struggles for citizen rights. What are these struggles? How does New Zealand's system reflect human rights?

- **The Treaty of Waitangi is responded to differently by people in different times and places (5)**

The Tiriti o Waitangi can be seen as a claim of rights by Māori, or an agreement on basic rights for all New Zealanders. Which human rights does it address? What are the similarities and differences between the Magna Carta and the Treaty as rights documents?

- **Ideas and actions of people in the past have had a significant impact on people's lives (5)**
- **Cultural interaction impacts on cultures and societies (5)**

Development of human rights ideas in one society has had significant impact on other societies throughout history, culminating in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and subsequent elaboration of rights in different treaties. How have cultures changed as human rights understandings have developed?

- **Economic decisions impact on people, communities, and nations (5)**

Economic decisions can have far-reaching impact on people's enjoyment of human rights. How? What are the positive and negative human rights impacts of economic globalisation?