



Literacy and Intervention

SAMPLE LESSON

Einstein's Who, What, and Where

Nonfiction Passages for Comprehension

Grades 4–7



Book 2

Writing the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS



Think about It

How can people make sure that everyone is treated fairly?

AS YOU READ Put a ★ beside each important idea in the story. Then write in the margin why each is important. Put a ✓ next to parts of the story that you find interesting. Put a ? next to parts of the story you do not understand.

NOTES

In April 1945, World War II was coming to an end. **Delegates** from fifty countries arrived in San Francisco for the first meeting of the founding conference of the United Nations. Many of the people at the gathering had been inspired by President Franklin Roosevelt's speech in 1941 about four freedoms. In this speech, Roosevelt said that future peace and safety were linked to respect for four freedoms: freedom of speech and expression, freedom to worship God in one's own way, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. The smaller countries decided that they wanted to set up an international standard against which every nation's behavior could be measured.

In 1946, the United Nations (UN) established the Human Rights Commission. Its job was to write the first **Universal** Declaration of Human Rights, listing the rights of all people. During the war millions of innocent people had been killed. Many smaller countries, as well as religious and **humanitarian** groups, wanted to make sure that so many people would never be so badly treated again.

In January 1947, the Human Rights Commission held its first meeting at the UN's temporary headquarters in an old factory building in Lake Success, New York. There were delegates from eighteen member countries: China, France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States, and thirteen other countries. Eleanor Roosevelt,

the **widow** of President Franklin Roosevelt, was the delegate to the Commission from the United States. No one was surprised when she was **unanimously** elected chairman of the Commission. For much of her life she had been a forceful champion of humanitarian causes. Roosevelt was considered by many to be “the most important person in the United Nations human rights program” and was a powerful reminder of her husband, who had been a strong, early supporter of the UN.

For any declaration to be accepted, the laws of the UN required that two-thirds of the nations that were members would have to agree with it. The members of the Commission knew that if they wanted to write a declaration that would be meaningful worldwide, they would have to overcome obstacles. Not only were there differences in language, culture, and politics among the delegates, but also some of them did not get along with each other. When relations between the Soviet Union and the United States worsened and new world problems developed, the committee members realized they would have to work quickly.

John Humphrey, a Canadian lawyer and head of the UN Secretariat, had prepared a rough draft, or first version, of what should be included in the declaration. Before Humphrey wrote his draft, he and his UN staff carefully studied human rights material sent to the UN by different government and private groups from all over the world. Then on June 9, 1947, eight of the committee members, who represented nations that often had very different opinions on how to deal with the world’s problems, met at the UN’s headquarters at Lake Success. Their job was to write the draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Quickly deciding that the group was still too large, they agreed that four members of the group—Rene Cassin, the French delegate, Charles Malik, the delegate from Lebanon, Geoffrey Wilson, the British delegate, and Eleanor Roosevelt—should prepare the draft. These four people agreed that the draft would have more unity if one person wrote it. Cassin, who was considered a legal genius, was asked to do this using Humphrey’s rough draft. Cassin included most of the content of Humphrey’s paper but gave it greater unity. He also decided to add a preamble, or introduction, where he explained the “why” of the declaration.

In December 1947, the full Human Rights Commission met in Geneva, Switzerland, to look over and make any necessary changes to Cassin’s document. Roosevelt was eager to finish the work before Christmas and laid out a work schedule that included night sessions. She wanted the committee to shorten the draft and to put it into language “which could be readily understood by the ordinary man or woman.” During long meetings the delegates discussed each part of the paper, sometimes working late into the night. Roosevelt wrote to her daughter, “The work here has been a constant drive & for that reason I will be glad when it is over.” By December 12, the Commission had a revised draft for discussion.

At this point, a number of countries began objecting to some of the Commission’s ideas about how the Declaration would be used. The main question was what would

happen if a nation did not respect the Declaration. Some countries feared that other countries might be able to come into their country and enforce the Declaration against their wishes.

When the drafting committee met again in May 1948 in New York, Roosevelt set out a strict schedule so that the work of having a final document to present to the full Human Rights Commission could be finished in just nine days. Even though there was a war going on in the Middle East and the members of the committee supported different sides of the **conflict**, work on the Declaration continued. When the committee had problems and the delegate from the Soviet Union suggested that they tear up what they had written and start fresh, Roosevelt gently asked him to help improve the draft. She reminded him that the world is made up of many states with many forms of government and that they all had to work together.

To help the delegates to get to know each other and to give them the opportunity to talk freely and “off the record,” Roosevelt had dinners and teas at her home in New York City. On June 18, the Human Rights Commission approved the Declaration. Twelve voted in favor and none voted against it. Following their governments’ orders, the Soviet Union, Byelorussia, the Ukraine, and Yugoslavia did not vote. The next step was to send this draft Declaration to all UN member states for their advice and comments.

In September 1948, the UN General Assembly held its fall meeting in Paris. The committee members were eager to pass the document. The United States and the Soviet Union were in conflict in Germany and Korea. The state of Israel had just been formed and the Arab countries were at war with Israel. For these reasons, the leaders of the Human Rights Commission knew that if the Declaration did not pass now, it might never pass. But before the General Assembly could vote on the Declaration, it had to be approved by a committee at the UN. Because she was chairman of the Human Rights Commission, Roosevelt presented the draft to this committee. She explained that it was a statement of principles, which set up “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.”

The committee then began examining the document. There were long debates about each point in the Declaration. After a month only three of the thirty articles in the Declaration were approved. Charles Malik, who was chairman of the committee, announced that it would begin holding night sessions. Lindstrom, the Swedish delegate, suggested a three-minute limit on any speeches about the articles and bought a stopwatch. The committee started working faster. On December 7, at three in the morning, the committee approved the draft and said it could be proposed to the General Assembly.

On December 9, 1948, Malik introduced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the General Assembly. Reminding the delegates that thousands of minds had helped in its formation, he explained that it was the first time that the principles of human rights and basic freedoms had been stated in exact detail. Roosevelt spoke

NOTES

next and praised the Declaration as an important step in the unfinished job of lifting human beings everywhere “to a higher standard of life and to a greater enjoyment of freedom.” At four minutes before midnight on December 10, the president of the General Assembly called the roll. Thirty-four delegates gave speeches supporting the document. The final vote showed forty-eight members in favor, eight members who did not vote, and none who voted against it. The president of the General Assembly closed the session by praising Roosevelt. Then the whole General Assembly rose to applaud her and cheer.

With the passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a new age in the history of human rights began. Countries that were created after World War II looked carefully at the Declaration and patterned the rights in their constitutions on the rights listed there. The principles listed in the Declaration helped human rights organizations to spotlight cruel treatment and to organize **grassroots** support for change. By saying that all the rights listed in the Declaration belong to everyone, everywhere, the Declaration asserted that all people had certain rights as human beings that no government could take away.

delegate *n.* a person or group of persons chosen to speak and act for another or others;
a representative

universal *adj.* relating to or affecting the whole world; worldwide

humanitarian *adj.* concerned with or promoting the general well-being of humanity

widow *n.* a woman whose husband has died

unanimously *adv.* based on or showing complete agreement

conflict *n.* a state of disagreement, as between persons, ideas, or interests

grassroots *adj.* coming from the basic or local level of a community rather than from a
higher level of power and control

LOOKING BACK AT WHAT YOU HAVE READ

1. What events inspired people to get together and write a Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

2. How many countries were represented at the first Human Rights Commission meeting?

3. Who prepared the first rough draft of the Declaration of Human Rights?

4. When people in a new country write their constitution, why do they look carefully at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

5. In which country or countries do you think people would be happier if human rights were more closely enforced? Explain your answer.

6. In order to be a successful chairman of the Human Rights Commission, what qualities do you think Eleanor Roosevelt needed to have?

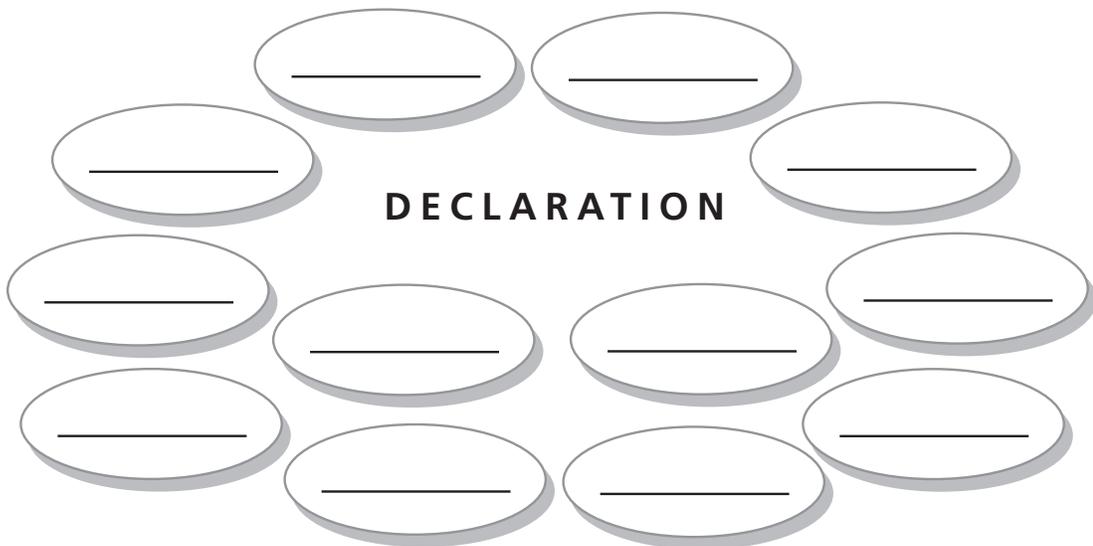
7. As the revised draft of the Declaration was being discussed, why did some countries object to how it would be used?

8. In order for the work on the Declaration to proceed as quickly and as smoothly as possible, what did some members of the commission have to do?

WORKING WITH WORDS

Word Puzzle

🌀 Using the letters in the word **DECLARATION**, see how many small words you can make. You may use a letter twice in your word if it appears twice in this word.



🌀 Look at the following phrases from the story. On the lines, write a sentence using each of the phrases that are in bold print.

Example:

a legal genius

You have to be a legal genius to solve this problem.

wanted to set up an **international standard**

the work here has been a **constant drive**

to talk freely and **off the record**

tear up what they had written and **start fresh**

to organize **grassroots support**

Do you remember that a **simile** is a phrase or expression introduced by the words *like* or *as*? It compares two things that are not alike.

Example: The sickly child was *as thin as a rail*.

🌀 Explain what the simile above means. Try to use it in a sentence.

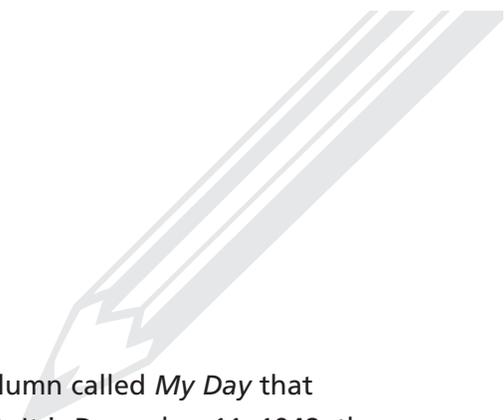
🌀 Now explain what the following similes mean and use them in sentences.

Some of the delegates were *as stubborn as mules*.

Sometimes Roosevelt thought the delegates were *as slow as molasses*.

When the Declaration was passed, Eleanor Roosevelt's eyes sparkled *like diamonds*.

WRITING SKILLS



From 1935 to 1962, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote a newspaper column called *My Day* that appeared six days a week. Pretend you are Eleanor Roosevelt. It is December 11, 1948, the day after the Declaration was passed, and you have to write your column. What will you say? Will you talk about what just happened at the General Assembly and how you feel about the Declaration? Perhaps you will write about something else.

Use as many paragraphs as you need. Be sure that your article has a title and that each paragraph has a topic sentence, which gives the main idea.

First, write down some key ideas. When you have finished your article, proofread your writing. Does it make sense? Have you included everything you wanted to say? Check it for correct spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation.

Key ideas

Key icon

Key icon

Key icon

Key icon

Title:



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You probably know that all students attending school in the United States have certain rights. Imagine that this is not so. You and a group of your fellow students want to propose a bill of rights for students to your local school board. First, you must write down the rights you think students should have. Then list them in order of importance; put the most important rights first.

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Now write a letter to the school board in which you discuss why students need a bill of rights and what your bill of rights would include. When you have finished your letter, proofread your writing. Does it make sense? Have you included everything you wanted to say? Check it for correct spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation.

Key ideas





