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**By Sita Brahmachari**



**In Our Hands:  
Exploring Freedom  
of Expression  
Through Creative  
Action in Our  
Communities**



**Seen**



**&**



**Heard**

**Human Rights Education resource 2**

## Human Rights Education resource 2

### In Our Hands: Exploring Freedom of Expression Through Creative Action in Our Communities

By Sita Brahmachari

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*Seen and Heard: Young People's Voices and Freedom of Expression.*

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This human rights education resource is one of a set of five, titled *Seen and Heard: Creative Journeys into Children's Rights*, designed to engage, inspire and support young people through creativity and critical thinking. The full set includes:

- Hear Me, See Me: A Creative Introduction to Children's Rights
- In Our Hands: Exploring Freedom of Expression Through Creative Action in Our Communities
- The Power of Empathy: Standing Up for Refugee and Migrant Rights
- Empowerment Through Solidarity for Human Rights
- Global Citizens Take Action: Creative Protest for Change

All five resources can be downloaded for free at <https://seenandheardproject.eu/hre-resources>

This resource is part of the *Seen and Heard: Young People's Voices and Freedom of Expression* – a European co-funded project that supports the empowerment of children and young people, particularly those at risk of exclusion, to exercise their right to freedom of expression through literature, art, creative protest and human rights education.

The project combines research, mentoring and activism to foster youth participation and amplify their voices in public dialogue. It brings together academics, educators, artists, and policymakers from Malta, Germany and Poland to support children aged 10 to 14 to speak out on issues that matter to them. More information: <https://seenandheardproject.eu/>

**Project led by the University of Malta and co-funded by the European Union.** Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



# Foreword

It is a pleasure to present *Seen and Heard: Creative Journeys into Children's Rights* – a collection of creative human rights education resources developed to support educators working with children and young people on key themes such as freedom of expression, migration, child rights, solidarity, creative action and protest.

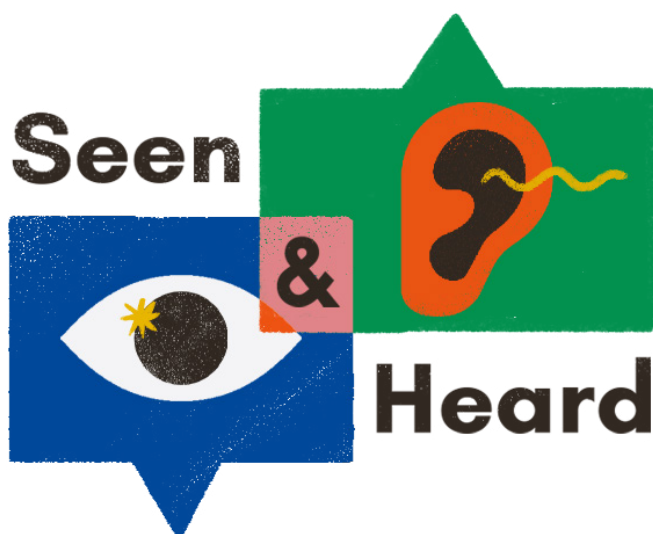
These resources are grounded in a simple but urgent truth: every child has rights – and those rights must be protected. Children are not just future citizens – they are rights-holders here and now. When young people know their rights and are supported to explore and express them, they gain the tools to stand up for themselves and for others.

This set of five resources offers flexible, creative tools to explore human rights through discussion, storytelling, art, drama and reflection – in ways that are both engaging and transformative.

Each activity is designed to take children on a meaningful and imaginative journey into discovering, expressing and defending their rights. We hope they inspire educators to adapt and expand these ideas to suit the needs, interests and possibilities of their own groups. There is no single way to teach human rights – these materials are an open invitation to make the topic your own. Our intention is these activities will support you in creating meaningful learning experiences that leave a positive and lasting impact.

My heartfelt thanks go to Sita Brahmachari, whose longstanding commitment to human rights with young people – in communities, youth theatre, and through her novels – brings these lessons to life with such magic and depth. I am also deeply grateful to Nicky Parker, whose extraordinary editorial hand shaped the materials into something meaningful and usable for every educator. It has been a true privilege to work with you both.

Katarzyna Salejko  
Head of Human Rights Education  
Amnesty International Poland



# Introduction

## About human rights education

Human rights education is important at every age. From birth, everyone is entitled to rights under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These international laws are rooted in shared human values, which are, in essence, ideas and feelings that guide how we live well together. Human rights values include fairness, equality, truth and safety.

We all have the right to human rights education. When we know and understand our rights and how they apply in everyday life, we are better able to stand up for ourselves and others. This is just as important for children as it is for adults.

Human rights education involves three dimensions:

- **Learning *about* human rights:** Gaining knowledge about what human rights are, and how they are defined and protected;
- **Learning *through* human rights:** Ensuring that the learning environment and process reflect human rights values – such as participation, respect, freedom of thought and expression. In human rights education, *how* we teach is just as important as *what* we teach;
- **Learning *for* human rights:** Developing the skills, attitudes and values needed to apply human rights in everyday life and to take action, individually or collectively, to promote and defend them.

## Safeguarding

As educators we are in ‘loco parentis’ – acting as trusted guardians for the children and young people in our care. During these workshops, if a student raises a safeguarding concern, follow your school’s protocols.

Do all your students know what these protocols are? If not, it might be helpful to talk through them with the whole class in a straightforward and calm way.

Making sure everyone understands who they can talk to and what support is available helps create a safer, more trusting environment for all.

# About this resource

*In Our Hands: Exploring Freedom of Expression Through Creative Action* is a flexible, creative human rights resource designed for teachers working with students aged 10 to 14. It supports young people to understand, explore and express their right to freedom of expression through discussion, writing, drama and art.

The resource includes seven adaptable activities which help students reflect on the change they want to see in the world, practise expressing their ideas clearly and creatively, and understand how freedom of expression links to other rights. It is rooted in key values of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially the rights to participation, voice, equality and education. The module is designed to create a safe, imaginative space where all students feel heard, respected, and empowered to speak up.

You can work through all the activities as a term-long project, or pick and mix individual activities to suit your available time and students' needs. Each lesson begins with clearly stated learning objectives.

The methodology underpinning this resource is rooted in the following children's rights:

- Participation
- Freedom of expression
- Equality and non-discrimination
- Education
- Play

## Target age range

All activities are suitable for students aged 10 to 14.

## Learning objectives

**This resource encourages participants to:**

- **Define** freedom of expression and explain why it is a fundamental right for all children and young people;
- **Reflect** on personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to fairness, justice and the desire for change;
- **Express** their ideas confidently through writing, storytelling, art and performance.
- **Identify** everyday opportunities to raise their voices and take meaningful action.
- **Connect** freedom of expression to other child rights and to wider values such as inclusion, empathy and solidarity;
- **Evaluate** how freedom of expression can empower individuals and communities to help build a more just and equal world.



# Freedom of expression at a glance

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, protected under Article 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It means that every child has the right to share their thoughts, opinions and ideas in ways that are respectful and safe – through speech, writing, art, or any other form they choose. It also includes the freedom to seek, receive and share information.

For children, this right is essential to being heard, participating in decisions that affect them, and developing their identity, creativity and confidence. Freedom of expression helps them to ask questions and think critically, challenge unfairness, celebrate what matters to them, and imagine and shape a better future.

However, this right is not unlimited. Expressions that cause harm, spread hate or violate the rights of others can be restricted. That's why freedom of expression must always be exercised with care, responsibility and respect – and why adults have a duty to create safe, supportive spaces where children and young people feel empowered to speak and be heard.

## Lesson plans and activities

### Lesson 1. In our hands: Freedom of expression

- Activity 1. Warm-up: What can hands do?
- Activity 2. In our hands and not in our hands
- Activity 3. Proverbs about hands

### Lesson 2. We want change

- Activity 1. Write: We want to change
- Activity 2. Hands of Change
- Activity 3. Our voices, our rights!
- Activity 4. Find, share, speak: Our right to know!



# Lesson 1

## In our hands: Freedom of expression

This lesson introduces the central idea of ‘in our hands’ through three engaging, reflective activities that explore hands as symbols of action, expression and connection. Students are encouraged to reflect on what they can influence – both individually and collectively – as they begin to understand the concept of agency. They will also consider how shared language, movement and gestures help us express ourselves and imagine change.



### Learning objectives

This lesson encourages participants to:

- Recognise hands as tools for action, communication and care;
- Differentiate between what is within their control, and what is beyond it;
- Explore individual and collective agency;
- Reflect on cultural expressions and how they shape our understanding of power and connection;
- Express their ideas and values through discussion and creative thinking.



### You will need

- Whiteboard or flipchart and markers
- Large sheet or poster paper
- Slips of paper or cards (optional)
- A classroom display area or a box labelled *In our hands*



## Activity 1

# Warm-up: What can hands do?

This short creative warm-up invites students to reflect on the meaning and power of hands – as tools for care, expression, identity and action. Through brainstorming and sharing ideas, students will begin to connect physical gestures with symbolic and emotional expressions of voice, agency and change.



### How long will it take?

15 minutes



### What to do

- Introduce the activity. Tell the class you are all going to take a moment to think about our hands. Our hands do so many things – they can express feelings, take care of each other, create things and even help us stand up for what we believe in.
- Write the phrase 'In our hands' on the board or a large sheet or poster paper.
- Invite students to brainstorm all the different things hands can do. Encourage them to think practically, creatively and symbolically. Use or display these prompt ideas if needed to get ideas flowing.

#### Hands can...

- Hold hands – in friendship, love, caring for each other
- Hold things – like banners, books, tools
- Hold *symbolic* things – like kindness, hope, responsibility
- Do things – like writing, painting, making, cooking, sport
- Touch – like stroking a pet
- Gesture and sign – to include others
- Welcome – to make others feel part of the community
- Wave – say hello, goodbye or catch someone's attention
- Identity, fingerprints – to enter a country
- Lifelines, fate lines – to think about life
- Call for change – to make things better
- Raise a hand – to ask a question, show agreement, or call for change



- List their ideas and keep adding to it.
- To end the brainstorm, highlight how many different things our hands can do – and how powerful they are when used with care, creativity and purpose.

## Activity 2

# In our hands and not in our hands

This reflective group activity helps students explore the difference between what they can influence and what may be beyond their control. By thinking individually and collectively, students will begin to understand agency, responsibility and the power of taking action together.



How long will it take?

**15 minutes**



What to do

- Tell the children that you've been thinking about what's '*in our hands*' – things we care about and things we can do to make a difference. But are there also things that are *not* in our hands? Ask: What do we mean when we say something *is* or *isn't* in our hands?
- On the board or flipchart, write two headings side by side:  
**IN OUR HANDS/NOT IN OUR HANDS**
- Ask students to call out examples for each category. Use prompts if needed, such as:  
*In our hands*: helping a friend, speaking kindly, planting a seed, writing a letter, creating art.  
*Not in our hands*: stopping a war, changing government laws, controlling the weather.
- Introduce the idea of *partial agency* – some things might not be fully in our hands, but we can still influence them. For instance, we can't stop climate change all by ourselves, but we can re-cycle, use less plastic and raise awareness. We can take actions that contribute to solutions.
- Deepen the reflection by introducing the idea of **my hands, your hands, our hands**. Ask:
  - What can I do on my own? (my hands)
  - What can others do that help me? (your hands)
  - What can we do better *together*? (our hands)
- Ask students for examples under each sub-category: **my, your, our**.
- If helpful, give examples:
  - *I can pick up rubbish – that's in my hands*
  - *You can write a poem – that's in your hands*
  - *We can make the school a kinder place – that's in our hands*



- Write responses under these headings. If time allows, invite students to write or draw their ideas on sticky notes or paper cut-out hands.
- Explain that while not everything is within their control, they do have power – especially when they act together.

### Activity 3

## Proverbs about hands

This short activity invites students to share and explore sayings and proverbs about hands from their own backgrounds. By reflecting on how different cultures use the metaphor of hands, students consider how language shapes our sense of agency, connection and limitation.



How long will it take?

**15 minutes**



What to do

- Ask the class if anyone knows any sayings or proverbs about hands from their home language, culture or family traditions.
- Offer examples if needed:
  - *Many hands make light work*
  - *Idle hands are the devil's workshop*
  - *To have your hands tied*
  - *To lend a hand*
- Invite the class to share proverbs or sayings they know, and what they think they mean.
- Of the examples shared, ask the class:
  - Which ones make us feel strong, connected or empowered?
  - Which ones suggest limitation, powerlessness or constraint?

### Optional reflection questions:

- What kinds of things feel truly in our hands?
- How does it feel when something is *not* in your hands?
- Can we still do something even if we're not in control?
- How can using our voice – through speaking, writing or creating – help bring something closer into our hands?

Invite students to write down their favourite empowering proverbs or sayings and display them around the In our Hands box or board.

# Lesson 2

## Voices in our hands: Creative expressions for change

In this lesson, students move from ideas to action, using writing and art to express changes they want to see in the world. Through collective writing and the creation of symbolic *Hands of Change*, they engage in speaking up, critical thinking and creative expressions of their values. Students also explore their right to seek, receive and share information, using real-life examples to reflect on the power of knowledge and diversity of voices. A concluding group reflection helps students recognise that they have been using and celebrating their right to freedom of expression – and that their voices matter.



### Learning objectives

This lesson encourages participants to:

- Express ideas for change using both writing and visual art and symbolism;
- Use a collective voice to communicate shared concerns or hopes;
- Understand freedom of expression and how it applies to their own lives;
- Reflect on their experience of using this right and recognise its power;
- Recognise their right to seek, receive and share information, and understand why access to knowledge and diverse voices is essential for justice and change.



### You will need

- Two sheets of A4 or card paper per student
- Pens, pencils, coloured markers or felt-tip pens
- Magazines, glue and scissors (optional, for collage)
- A classroom box or display area labelled *In our Hands*
- A board, wall or window space to create a Hands of Change display
- Sticky notes or slips of paper for reflection statements (optional)
- Space for a classroom Wall of Knowledge (bulletin board, poster or digital padlet)



## Activity 1

# Write: We want to change

This writing activity helps students give voice to issues they care about and imagine speaking directly to someone with the power to respond. It strengthens their sense of agency and collective voice, and builds confidence using writing as a tool for action.



### How long will it take?

**45 minutes**



### What to do

- Tell students they will practise clearly expressing what they care about and what they want to change.
- Explain that under the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child, children have the right to express their views on matters that affect them – and that adults have a responsibility to listen. You can refer to *Freedom of expression at a glance* on page 6.
- Ask students to think of something they would like to change for the better. Encourage them to choose something that's real and meaningful to them – it can be personal, something in school or the community, or the world.
- Tell them to imagine they are writing to someone in power and should ask themselves: What would I want them to change?
- Give each student a slip of paper or card.
- Ask them to write one sentence beginning with: We want to change...
- Provide examples if needed:
  - We want to change how some children are left out at break time.
  - We want to change the amount of plastic in our oceans.
  - We want to change the way people talk to each other online.
- Ask students to fold their paper and place it in the In our hands box.
- Randomly select three to five statements to read out, or pass them around in a circle for students to read out.
- After each one, ask:
  - Do you agree with this idea for change?
  - How does it make you feel?
  - Is it something we can help change? How?
- Allow brief open discussion after each idea to practise listening, reflecting and connecting.

- For a closing reflection, ask:
  - Did it feel different to write as 'we' instead of just 'I'?
  - What happens when many people want the same change?
  - Do you think someone in power would listen to this message? Why or why not?

## Activity 2

# Hands of Change

This creative activity helps students reflect on the changes they care about and express their ideas using art and writing. It builds confidence in sharing their voice through symbols and stories, and connects values, hopes and actions to the right to freedom of expression.



### How long will it take?

**45 minutes**



### What to do

- Tell the students that they are going to make something called Hands of Change. These are a pair of hand-shaped artworks that show what they care about and how they want the world to change:
  - One hand will focus on art and images;
  - The other hand will focus on writing and words.
- Explain that hands are powerful – they can hold, create, care, protect, express – and today they will use theirs to imagine and express what change means to them.
- Give each student two sheets of paper or card.
- Ask them to draw around both hands – one on each sheet.
- On each finger, ask students to write a word or short phrase that matters to them. These can reflect personal values, hopes, or things they believe in (eg Respect, Stop pollution, Kindness, My voice matters, Help others).
- On the palm of the art hand, students can:
  - Draw or collage images or symbols of positive change (eg a heart, lightbulb, tree, bridge, globe, peace sign).
- On the palm of the writing hand, students can:
  - Write a slogan, short poem or message about change;
  - Add one specific action they believe is *in our hands* – something they or others can do to help make the change real.



- Encourage students to use only one side of each hand shape and to be as creative or symbolic as they like – there are no wrong answers.
- If they need inspiration, remind them of the earlier brainstorm about what hands can do (welcome, protect, create, carry, express).
- Ask students to:
  - Cut out both hand shapes when they've finished.
  - Share in pairs, small groups, or whole class.
  - Create a display – arrange all the hands together on a classroom wall, window or bulletin board as a collective Hands of Change.
- Invite the class to observe the display and reflect on shared themes. Ask: What common values, hopes or actions can you see in everyone's hands?
- Optional reflection questions:
  - What does your Hand of Change say about you?
  - How did it feel to express your ideas this way, instead of just writing or talking?
  - What might someone in power learn from looking at these Hands of Change?

### Activity 3

## Our voices, our rights!

This short reflective activity helps students recognise that everything they've shared, created and expressed throughout this lesson is using their right to freedom of expression. It invites them to name this right clearly, connect it to their own actions, and celebrate it collectively.



How long will it take?

**20 minutes**



What to do

- Tell students that over the last two lessons, they've been using an important human right – even if they didn't realise it, yet. Do they know which one?
- Ask:
  - What have we done in the past lessons? Shared ideas, created amazing artwork, talked about what matters and imagined change...
  - What do all these actions have in common?  
What right were we using?
- Introduce the term freedom of expression (write it on the board). You can refer to *Freedom of expression at a glance* on page 6. Explain that it means:

- We all have the right to say what we think and feel.
  - We can do this through talking, writing, art, or other creative forms as long as we do it respectfully.
  - This right is protected by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 13).
- In pairs or small groups, ask students to answer this question:  
How did I use my right to freedom of expression during these lessons?  
Students can write a sentence or two or draw a symbol or image to show their response.
  - Ask volunteers to share.
  - On a big sheet of paper or display board, collect their drawings and thoughts for a collective poster titled Our freedom to express: In our hands.
  - Optional reflection questions:
    - Why is this right important for children?
    - How did it feel to know you were using a human right?
    - What would it be like if we did not have this right? If we lived in a place where you couldn't say what you think or feel?
    - How can we make sure everyone in our class feels safe to use their voice?

## Activity 4

# Find, share, speak: Our right to know!

This activity helps students understand that freedom of expression includes the right to seek, receive and share information and ideas. It encourages critical thinking about who controls information, truth versus misinformation and why access to diverse voices – including books and stories – matters.



How long will it take?

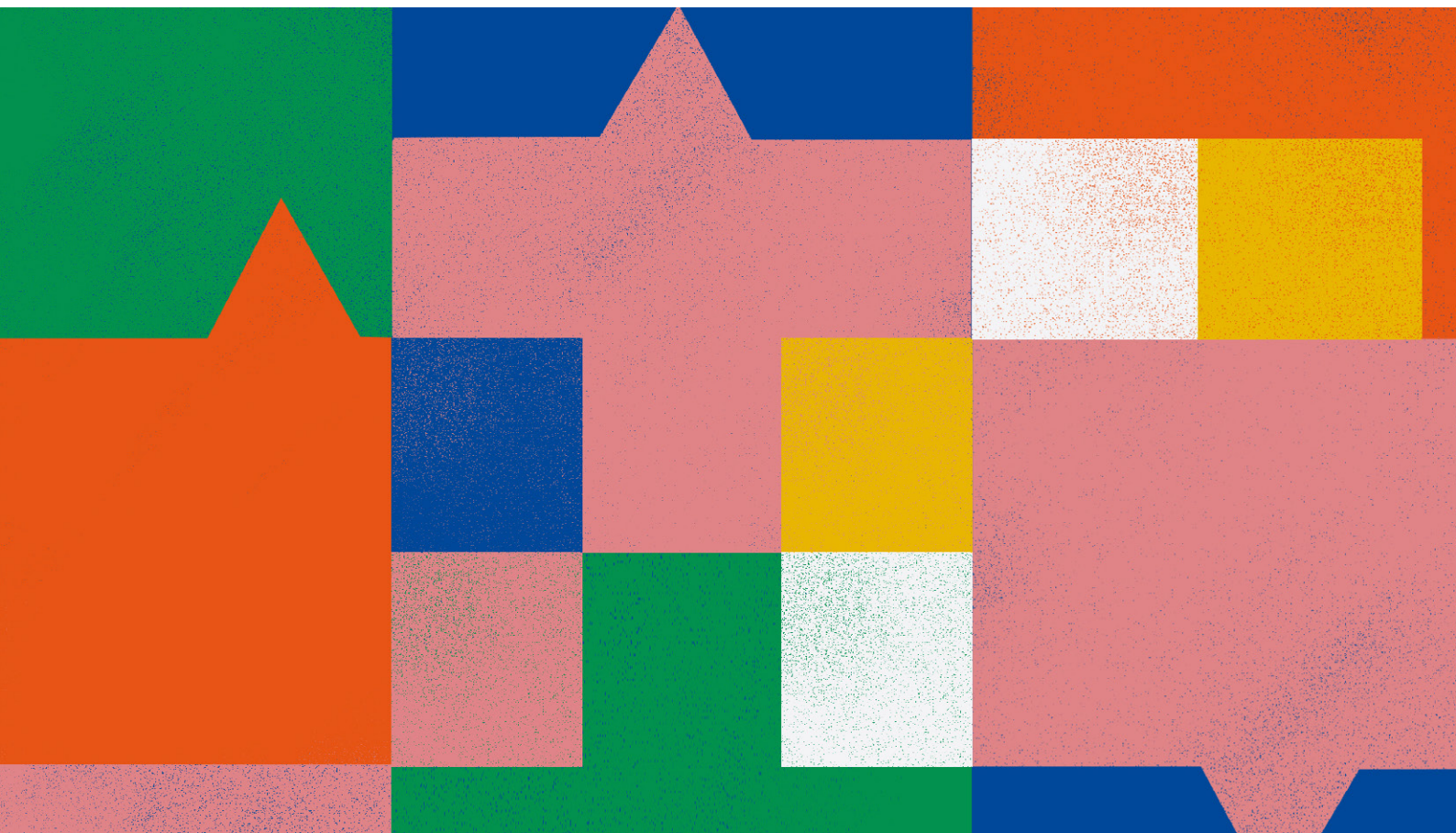
**30-40 minutes**



What to do

- Begin by reminding students that freedom of expression isn't just about speaking – it's also the right to know, to read and to learn from different people and perspectives.
- Tell them that in some places, books for children and young people are being banned or removed from libraries and schools – especially books about people who are different, like migrants, LGBTQI families or people challenging stereotypes.
- Ask: Why do you think someone might want to ban or block a book or story?  
Let students share their thoughts openly.
- Then ask: Why might it be important for young people to read different stories, ideas and perspectives? Can blocking information ever be dangerous?

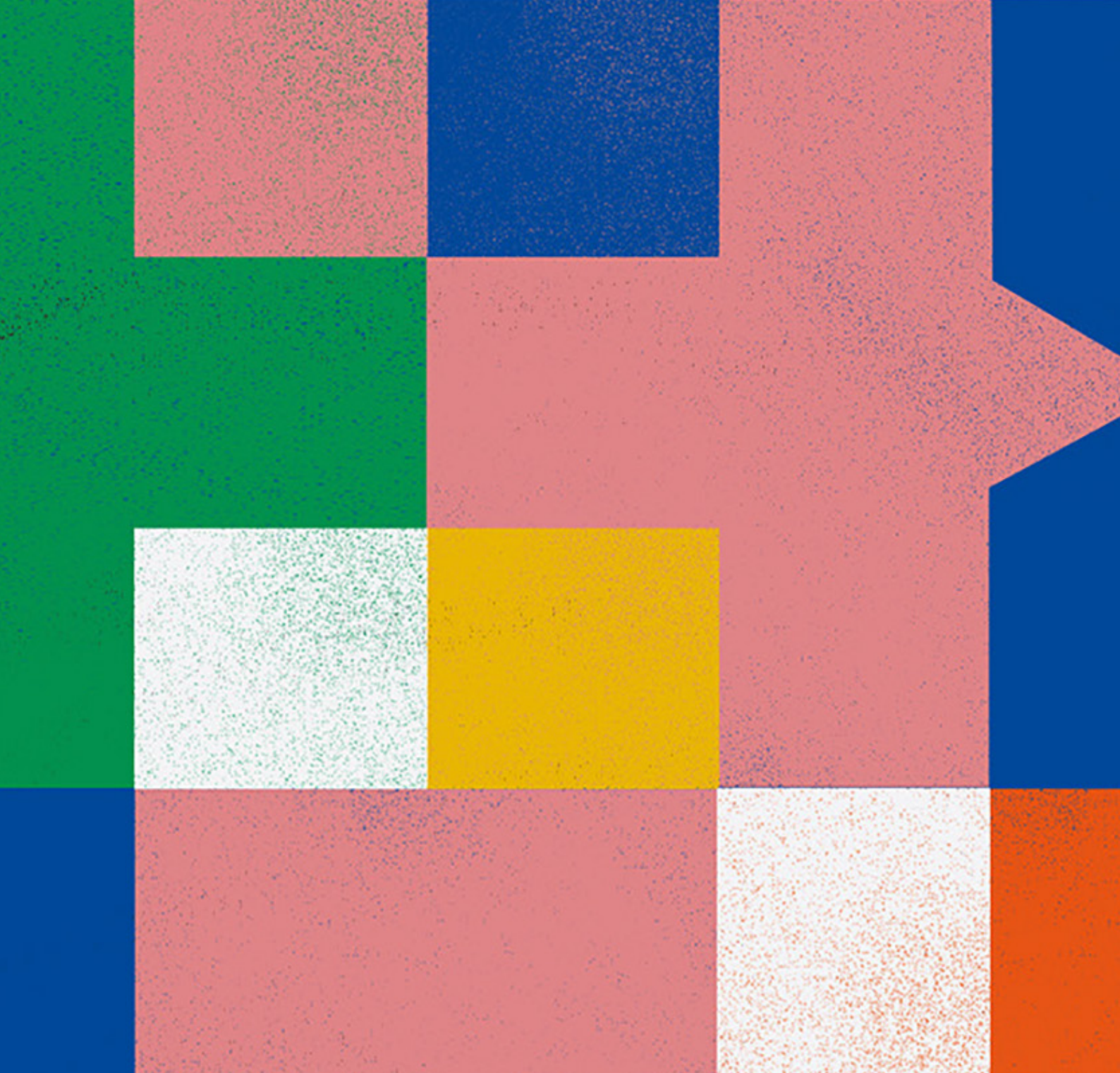
- Divide the class into pairs or small groups and give them six to eight short scenarios (see examples below) and ask them to decide:
  - Is this an example of freedom of expression?
  - Whose voice is being heard? Whose voice might be silenced?
  - What should happen?
- Examples of scenarios (adaptable):
  - A library removes a book about a child with two dads from the children's section.
  - A student creates a poster about climate change, but the school refuses to display it.
  - A girl writes a poem about being Muslim and wants to read it at assembly.
  - A teacher encourages students to research different opinions on a topic.
  - A viral social media post spreads false information about a protest.
  - A boy wants to read a graphic novel in class, but it's on a restricted list.
  - A student recommends a book about refugees – some parents object.
- After discussion, ask the pairs/groups to choose one scenario that stood out to them and share why. What happened and how they would support freedom of expression and access to knowledge in this case?
- Optional follow-up: Invite students to create a classroom Wall of Knowledge – a space where they can recommend books they've loved, podcasts that opened their minds, videos or websites that helped them learn something new about the world, and people who inspire them. Add more recommendations throughout the term/school year.



# Further resources

- Amnesty International, *An Introduction to Human Rights* (e-learning course).  
[academy.amnesty.org](https://academy.amnesty.org)
- Amnesty International, *Protect the Protest* (e-learning course).  
[academy.amnesty.org](https://academy.amnesty.org)
- Amnesty International, *Respect My Rights, Respect My Dignity, Module 4: Refugees' and Migrants' Rights are Human Rights*, 2018.  
[PDF](#)
- Amnesty International, Angelina Jolie and Geraldine Van Bueren, *Know Your Rights and Claim Them: A Guide for Youth*, Andersen Press, 2021.
- Amnesty International Australia, *Understanding Your Human Rights*, 2022.  
[PDF](#)
- Amnesty International UK, *Refugee Rights Primary Pack*, 2024.  
[PDF](#)
- Sita Brahmachari, *Artichoke Hearts*, Macmillan Children's Books, 2011.
- Sita Brahmachari, *Phoenix Brothers*, Oxford University Press, 2025.
- Sita Brahmachari, *Read Leaves*, Macmillan Children's Books, 2014.
- Nicky Parker and Amnesty International, *These Rights Are Your Rights: An Empowering Guide for Children Everywhere*, Andersen Press, 2024.
- *Seen and Heard: Young People's Voices and Freedom of Expression* – European co-funded project on young people's freedom of expression.  
[www.seenandheardproject.eu](http://www.seenandheardproject.eu)





This resource is part of the *Seen and Heard: Young People's Voices and Freedom of Expression*. More information:  
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