



Religious Studies 15  
Social Studies 10/13, 20/23 and 30/33

Preventing  
Prejudice

Respecting  
Diversity

Resolving  
Conflict  
Peacefully

## Amnesty International and Human Rights

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### Lesson Objective

This lesson will help students understand human rights issues by examining the work of Amnesty International (AI). AI's activities initially focused on the *rights of prisoners of conscience*— people jailed and often tortured because of their political and/or religious beliefs. Recently, AI has broadened its mandate to deal with broader issues related to human rights violations. This lesson helps students learn more about the organization and provides an opportunity for them to take action to help free prisoners of conscience. After learning about human rights abuses, students are encouraged to write letters urging amnesty for those who have been treated unjustly.

**Time** 60 minutes

### Religious Studies 15 Learner Outcomes

#### Knowledge

- To understand what it means to be human from a Catholic perspective (Alberta Religious Studies Curriculum Unit 1)
- To explore our relationship to civil society from a Catholic perspective (Alberta Religious Studies Curriculum Unit 6)
- To explore the call to bear witness to Christ in the world (Alberta Religious Studies Curriculum Unit 8)

#### Skills

- Take action to demonstrate understanding of above knowledge outcomes

#### Attitudes

- Develop an appreciation of the diversity that exists in the world

#### Skills (CTS)

- Apply knowledge of computer skills including word processing, Web browsing and so on working (copying, pasting) between applications

### Social Studies 10/13 Learner Outcomes

Topic B Theme III Rights and Responsibilities – basic human rights need to be protected: rights, freedom, justice and equality (For example, Amnesty International)

## **Social Studies 20/23 Learner Outcomes**

Topic B Theme IV Alternative Futures: Possibilities for Change – social action

## **Social Studies 30/33 Learner Outcomes**

Topic A Theme II Political and Economic Systems in Practice – new issues and ideas challenge traditional political and economic beliefs and practices – human rights, justice

## **Safe and Caring Topics and Concepts**

### **Respecting Diversity and Preventing Prejudice**

Respecting Human Rights

- Examining the meaning of respect for the dignity and rights of all persons . . . without prejudice as to race, religious beliefs, color, sex, sexual orientation, physical characteristics, dress, age, ancestry or place of origin

Respecting Different Points of View Builds Community and Helps to Prevent or Resolve Conflict

Recognizing and Appreciating Contributions Made by Culturally Distinctive Groups Builds Respect for Diversity

### **Resolving Conflict Peacefully**

- Studying different cultures, religions and lifestyles in society and in the school  
Carrying Out a Service Learning Project

## **Teaching Strategies**

### **Inquiry Learning**

Cognitive Coaching/Metacognition

### **General Teaching Activities/Ideas (Gen)**

Creating Posters, News Centres and Interactive Bulletin Boards

Brainstorming

## **Supplementary Resources**

- Student Handout 1 “Amnesty International – Taking Action on Human Rights” (assignment instructions)
- 1 computer station per student with Internet access and word processing capability
- Amnesty International [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)
- Amnesty International Canada [www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca)

## **Learning Activities for Amnesty International and Human Rights**

### **Knowledge Now**

Engage students in a general discussion about human rights. Ask them which human rights they value most as individuals. Why is protecting human rights important? Ask them to list the rights they have as Canadians, students citizens of the planet.

Ask students to think about the following terms individually and then discuss their ideas with a partner:

- amnesty
- international
- human
- rights

Engage the class in a discussion of these terms and ask for examples.

### **Engaging Interest**

Ask students to go to [www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca) and browse the Amnesty International (AI) Canada website.

### **Learning Activities**

Give students the assignment titled Student Handout 1 “Amnesty International – Taking Action on Human Rights.” Ask them to open a new document in Microsoft Word and to type their answers to Parts 1 and 2. Review the answers, discuss the concept of amnesty and clarify points that students raise.

Tell students that they can take action to make a difference in the lives of people who have had their rights violated. Ask students to choose a specific case from the website. Their task will be to write a letter on behalf of the person whose rights have been violated. The letter will urge that action be taken to rectify the injustice. Ensure that the letter is addressed to the appropriate person. It is important to use the tip sheet provided on the website so that they follow appropriate protocol in writing their letters. After editing and proofreading, students sign their letters, address the envelopes and mail them.

### **Assessment and Analysis**

It is extremely important to discuss the various situations and cases that are featured. Provide time to hear student reactions, which will vary. The AI situations may be quite upsetting for some students. They may even trigger disturbing personal reactions or memories for some. This lesson must be handled sensitively and carefully.

Consider evaluating the letters prior to mailing them. Offer opportunities to correct mistakes or rewrite the letters if necessary. Urge students to bring responses they might receive back to class. Make a bulletin board that features pictures, letters and responses. Post a map that identifies areas of conflict and places where the violations are occurring.

### **Application**

Conclude the lesson by pointing out the positive differences that principled action has made in the past. Highlight stories of reconciliation and reunion that have characterized Amnesty International’s history. Students will become aware of world situations and should come to understand the power each individual has in effecting change. Reinforce the idea that their actions can make a difference. Encourage students to establish an Amnesty Club in the school.

## **Amnesty International – Taking Action on Human Rights**

This assignment will provide an opportunity to examine the work of a leading human rights organization—Amnesty International (AI) Canada. While it is important to be aware of human rights abuses, it is even more important to know that there is something individual students can do to help. This assignment will help you become informed and provide suggestions for action to stop human rights abuses.

### **Getting Ready**

Go to [www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca) and take some time to browse the site. Open a new Microsoft Word document. Save the document as “yournameAI.”

### **Part 1 Learning about Amnesty International (AI)**

1. Go to “About Amnesty” on the website and copy the description of Amnesty International into your document. Answer the following questions about AI:

- What is the main goal of AI?
- What kinds of actions does AI take to protect human rights? List and describe these four actions. Use your own words.
- What types of human rights cases does Amnesty International champion?
- Which governments and religious organizations support AI? Explain their roles.

### **Part 2 Case Studies**

Go to “Act Now” and choose a case that you find interesting or disturbing. Copy the case into the document. Include the contact address associated with the case.

### **Part 3 Taking Action**

Knowing about human rights abuses is the first step in the process of making change. There are simple ways that you can make a real difference. Select a case that speaks to you and write a letter on behalf of the person whose rights have been violated. Make sure that your letter is respectful and factual and that it clearly states the action that needs to be taken. Go to the website and click on Action, Letter Writing Tips before you begin. It is extremely important to follow these suggestions.

To write the letter, select a template by clicking on “New” in Microsoft Word and choose “Letters and Faxes” then “Professional Letter.” Save the document as [yourname, ltr.]

- Insert your address or the school address in the [Click here and type return address] section.
- Copy the address from your other document to put in the [Click here and type recipient’s address] section.
- Write a response to the specific case that you identified earlier. Base your response on the information that was given in the Act Now section of this assignment. Your letter can begin simply with “We would like (insert name of prisoner) to be released.” Or you can put in more detail, for example, “Based on the illegal or immoral

imprisonment of (insert name of prisoner), we request that (insert name) be released immediately.”

- Type your name where it says [Click here and type your name] and type “Student” where it says [Click here and type job title].
- Print your letter and exchange it with another student. Make revisions based on input from your partner and the teacher.
- Sign and send the letter.