

**LESSON PLAN**

**What Are Human Rights?  
The History of Ideas**

FOUNDATION: *UNIT II. What Are Human Rights and Where Do They Come From?*  
Created by: Angela Nichols, Omaha South High School

**LENGTH**

3 days

**NEBRASKA SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS**

US History: 12.1.2  
Government: 12.3.1, 12.3.2  
World History: 12.1.14, 12.2.4, 12.2.7

**McREL NATIONAL STANDARDS**

US History: 12.1.2, 12.1.5, 12.2.3  
World History: 12.4.1, 12.5.2  
Government: 12.7.2

**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will research and become familiar with the historical philosophers whose ideas influenced the creation of several human rights.
2. Students will compare philosophical beliefs and decide which documents are a result of whose influence.
3. Students will discuss each document's rights, limitations, and individual responsibilities.

**TERMS**

Magna Carta  
Petition of Right  
English Bill of Rights  
Rights of an Englishman  
US Constitution  
US Bill of Rights  
Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**MATERIALS**

- Philosophers Sample handout
- Board or overhead
- Websites:
  - Magna Carta from The British Library  
<http://www.bl.uk/collections/treasures/magna.html>
  - English Petition of Right  
<http://www.constitution.org/eng/petright.htm>
  - English Bill of Rights  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th\\_century/england.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/england.asp)
  - US Constitution  
<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html>
  - US Bill of Rights  
<http://www.unl.edu/HumanR/teach/00/0000/media/BillOfRights.pdf>  
[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill\\_of\\_rights.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights.html)
  - Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
<http://www.unl.edu/HumanR/teach/00/0000/media/UniversalDeclarationHumanRights.pdf>  
<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

**Day One:**

- I. Students will begin the lesson with an introduction of four famous philosophers who have been cited for influencing some of the most important rights documents in our history:
  - i. John Locke
  - ii. Jean-Jacques Rousseau
  - iii. Thomas Hobbes
  - iv. Voltaire

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- II. Have the students divide up a sheet of paper into four boxes, within each box have the students write the name of each philosopher and their main beliefs. See Philosophers Sample handout.

**Day Two:**

- III. On the board or overhead, give the students a list of important historical government documents. Examples:
  - 1. Magna Carta
  - 2. Petition of Rights
  - 3. English Bill of Rights
  - 4. Rights of an Englishman
  - 5. US Bill of Rights
  - 6. US Constitution
  - 7. Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- IV. As a class, discuss briefly the importance of and main idea behind as well as what the original authors hoped for each document.
  - Use these three topics for explanation:
    - 1. What human rights were protected by this document?
    - 2. What limitations did this document put on government control?
    - 3. What, if any, responsibilities were placed on the individual?
- V. With a partner or in small groups, allow the students time to discuss which of the philosopher's enlightenment ideas are present in each document. For each philosopher, have the group offer a supporting fact or opinion as to why it chose this person.

**Day Three:**

- VI. Bring the class back together to share the discoveries they have made.
- VII. Go through each document. First, allow the groups to express their choices and opinions as to why each document was created. Then underneath each document, have the students add on the correct philosopher(s). Add any needed points not mentioned by students.
- VIII. End the list with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the US Constitution. Discuss all of the influential thinkers from the Enlightenment period visible in the writings. Hold group discussions about possible rights that are missing or not mentioned and have the students speak about whose influence might have changed either document for better and worse.

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**Philosophers Sample**

| <b>John Locke</b>  | <b>Voltaire</b>      |
|--|----------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Believed in individual and equal freedom for all men.</li><li>• Believed that government should be “hands off” and be without much power or control.</li></ul> |                      |
| <b>Jean-Jacques Rousseau</b>   | <b>Thomas Hobbes</b> |
|  |                      |