Curriculum subject: Citizenship
Key Stage: 3 and 4

Theme: Magna Carta today
Topic: Human rights: A ‘Magna Carta’ for all humanity

Rationale
Almost every day, we are confronted with another news story involving human rights. But human rights are not new and have developed over a long period. The 1215 Magna Carta can be understood as an important, early human rights document that both limited the power of a tyrannical King and created a right to appeal against unlawful imprisonment, which remains an important part of English law through the 1998 Human Rights Act.

In this activity pupils will learn that human rights are not a new idea, and the struggle to protect rights continues. Pupils will find out about the key human rights documents: the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the 1998 Human Rights Act. They will undertake research into each topic to create and present an ‘information board’ to share findings with their peers. They will discuss why the protection of human rights remains significant today.

Pupils will benefit from some prior knowledge and understanding of human rights, the values that underpin human rights and the history and events leading up to the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This activity can be used in conjunction with another of our Magna Carta lesson plans: ‘Habeas Corpus, human rights and detention’.

Additional Information: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), referred to by Eleanor Roosevelt as ‘a Magna Carta for all humanity’, was key to the development of rights as we understand them today. This was created by governments around the world who had become members of the United Nations, an organisation whose aim was and is to stop wars and promote international dialogue following the atrocities of World War Two. In 1949 the Council of Europe was established to promote unity in Europe. In 1950 the Council adopted the European Convention on Human Rights to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms including a right to a fair trial. The rights set out in the European Convention (in force since 1953) were made directly enforceable in the UK through the 1998 Human Rights Act.
Content

Historical sources:
- Magna Carta, 1215
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- Human Rights Act 1998

Recommended reading (short articles):
- Magna Carta and human rights by Shami Chakrabarti
- Human rights legislation by Hugh Starkey

Films:
- Animation: 800 years of Magna Carta
- The relevance of Magna Carta in 2015

Key questions
- What are human rights?
- What do the key human rights documents say?
- What are the links between Magna Carta and human rights?
- How have human rights been enshrined in English law?
- Why do human rights continue to need protection today?

Activities
1) Explore with pupils whether human rights are a new idea. Ask pupils to write down individually when they think human rights were created. Take feedback from the class.
2) Organise groups of pupils to research the key human rights documents: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the 1998 Human Rights Act. Give pupils access to appropriate source materials, including items from the British Library so that they can sift information and find answers to key questions. For example, for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, pupils could find out:
   a) What human rights were abused in World War Two?
   b) Why was the United Nations formed?
   c) Who was involved in drafting the declaration?
d) What reasons for protecting human rights are given in the opening text of the UDHR?
e) What values underpin the UDHR?
f) Identify at least two different examples of social and economic rights and two different examples of civil and political rights from the articles.

3) Using their findings, ask pupils to create an ‘information board’ or presentation on their research that can be shared with the other groups in the class. Place a board on each document in a different part of the classroom. Allow pupils to move between each board to find answers to the key questions for the topics which they did not undertake research into in their group. You could ask a pair of pupils from each group to act as ‘experts’ to explain the information board they helped to create and take questions from their peers. Ensure all pupils have the opportunity to visit each information board and record the answers to the key questions. Any unanswered questions can be explained during a class debrief.

4) Explain that the 1215 Magna Carta can be understood as an early human rights document that limited the power of the King, to ensure he too had to obey certain laws as well as establish some important rights such as the right to justice and to appeal against unlawful imprisonment. Using the British Library translation of 1215 Magna Carta, ask pupils to read the text of clause 39 and identify which human rights articles in the UDHR, the European Convention and the 1998 Human Rights Act they think it relates to.

5) Take feedback from the class and draw together learning with a discussion about why many people believe our human rights, as enshrined in Magna Carta, need to continue to be protected in the future.

Extension activities

- For Key Stage 4 pupils, research, prepare for and take part in a class debate on replacing the 1998 Human Rights Act with a ‘British Bill of Rights’. This should include some of the arguments from those who believe the 1998 Human Rights Act is sometimes abused. You could use the quote from Shami Chakrabarti’s article as a motion: ‘Human rights empower the weakest in our society, and are a necessary irritant to the mighty’. After the debate, encourage your class to write their own ‘British Bill of Rights’. Ask them to consider what they might include and to come up with a plan to lobby their local MP and relevant organisations to have their ideas heard.

- Students could create a poster, newspaper article or blog as part of a wider campaign for change relating to the topics addressed during your teaching of Magna Carta.