Ethics and Human Sciences (World Politics)

In a recent visit to an St. Clare's International College, students took part in a conference entitled 'Human Rights and Human Wrongs.' The specific focus of the conference was on the political turmoil involving the Palestinian and Israeli conflict over national boundaries. Students were asked to reflect on the 'UN Declaration of Human Rights' and to question the efficacy of applying its principles in the resolution of the conflict - a good idea for a TOK presentation.

The central argument was that the notion of 'rights' is like fashion - it changes and evolves according to the existing *zeitgeist* or climate of ideas that pervades the political arena of the time. During one era, we are more concerned with group rights (*eg.* early 20th Century Women's Movement), whereas during another era, we're more interested in individual rights (*eg.* the so-called 'sexual revolution' in the 1960s).

Various knowledge issues were raised concerning the meaning of the document and you can explore some of these in your own presentations:

1. To what extent does the UN document cater for *individual* rights?

2. How far does the UN document uphold the rights of particular *groups*?

3. In what way does the UN document lay down *proscriptive* or prohibitive rights?

4. Under which circumstances does the UN document put forward *prescriptive* or regulatory rights?

Check through the [UN document](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/) to find articles that pertain to these rights and see if you can discover real life examples that either fulfil the articles or are in direct contravention of them.

Some further questions you might reflect on:

* Is there such a thing as 'Universal Rights'?
* If you were producing a Bill of Rights, what would be in your top 10?
* Should rights be enforced at an international level? If so, how?
* What happens when ethical principles become a matter of obligation?

Here are also some topics that students had to research and for which they had to prepare a short case study in advance of the conference. They would make ideal TOK presentations:

* Sweat (not the sugary things we like to eat!) shops
* Child labour
* Torture
* Detention without trial
* The arms trade
* Drug production and trafficking
* Sex trafficking
* Pollution
* Blood diamonds
* Child soldiers
* Global poverty
* Corruption at the highest level in government and other public institutions
* Freedom of the press
* Women's rights
* Genital mutilation of females
* Child trafficking
* Identity cards
* Racism/sexism/ageism
* Homophobia

Whatever topic you choose, aim to get a GLOBAL perspective on it; that is, find an example from another part of the world that relates to your topic.

On the following two pages are examples of knowledge issues that can be explored. Donʼt forget that a knowledge claim must be identified in relation to the issue explored that gives it a real-life situation and context.

\* Is it reasonable to believe in God?

\* Are American civil rights and due process being threatened currently?

\* How should we live? What is the good life? (Great for role-playing)

\* Should gay marriage be allowed?

\* How similar are we to animals?

\* Should factory-styled agricultural practices be banned?

\* How free are we to choose our actions and our characters?

\* Does life have a purpose?

\* What is art? How can we know which art is good?

\* What is the connection between the mind and body?

\* Does madness exist and how can it be determined?

\* Is the death sentence just?

\* Should euthanasia be a crime?

\* Do dreams mean?

\* Should animal testing be allowed?

\* What is artificial intelligence?

\* Is homosexuality a choice?

\* Is there any evidence for an afterlife/reincarnation?

\* Can atheism be a moral choice?

\* Does the soul exist?

\* What is the evidence for extraterrestrial life?

\* Are all religions one?

\* What problems surface when translating and attaching truth to various religious texts?

\* What are the major differences between the East and the West?

\* Have women made significant social, economic, and legal gains in the last century?

\* What should be the limits of science?

\* Which form of government is best?

\* How far should genetic engineering go?

\* Are there real differences between the sexes?

\* Can dance communicate? (Consider dance performance as a visual)

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