

# HERE I STAND

## Stories that speak for freedom

*Edited by Amnesty International UK  
Walker Books*



*Here I Stand*, an anthology from Amnesty International, explores the rights and freedoms we enjoy in the 21st century... and those for which we still need to fight.

The collection has contributions from 25 leading writers and illustrators inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Their stories and poems are poignant, challenging, heartbreaking, angry and haunting. They cover issues likely to resonate with teenagers today, such as fear of terrorism, hostility to refugees, lives locked into gang 'honour', child sex abuse, freedom of speech, invasive state surveillance, homophobic bullying and race hatred. All touch on the importance of having the courage to speak up against injustice, and for freedom, solidarity and activism.

*Here I Stand* will help young minds confront darker aspects of humanity. There are also some empowering stories, as in the midst of horror people respond with compassion and courage. We see how precious and fragile our rights are; how they need to be defended constantly; and how we all need to support each other and do what we can to bring about a school, community and world we want to live in.

Contributors include John Boyne, author of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, Scottish poet laureate Jackie Kay, Costa-winners Frances Hardinge and Christie Watson, Carnegie 2016 winner Sarah Crossan, Matt Haig, Neil Gaiman, AL Kennedy and imprisoned WikiLeaks whistleblower Chelsea Manning, with an introduction from prominent human rights lawyer Jules Carey.

### THESE NOTES CONTAIN:

- A general writing activity
- Discussion questions about the short stories divided into three colour-coded sections:  
**RIGHTS ENJOYED**  
**RIGHTS DEFENDED**  
**RIGHTS VIOLATED**

Edited extracts from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and preamble used in this resource are from Amnesty's My Rights Passport. Free copies are available from **01788 545553**, quote product code **ED112**.

See (and download) a full version of the UDHR at [www.amnesty.org.uk/universal](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/universal)

It will be useful for each student to have a copy of the Articles or the My Rights Passport when studying the texts.

These rights are defined further in the Convention on the Rights of the Child ([www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)) and, in the UK, the Human Rights Act.

### ACTIVITY WRITE TO SOMEONE

Some of the stories in *Here I Stand* talk directly to the person responsible for their suffering or to those who had the power to prevent it. For example, *Love is a Word Not a Sentence* and *The Colour of Humanity*.

- Write in the voice of one of these characters. You could write as if you were talking to the narrator or address someone else e.g. the police, a best friend or a relative.



# WHEN HUMAN RIGHTS ARE ENJOYED

If everyone recognises the essential dignity and worth of all human beings and if everyone recognises that all human beings have the same basic, equal rights, then this will lead to freedom, justice and peace in the world.  
Preamble, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

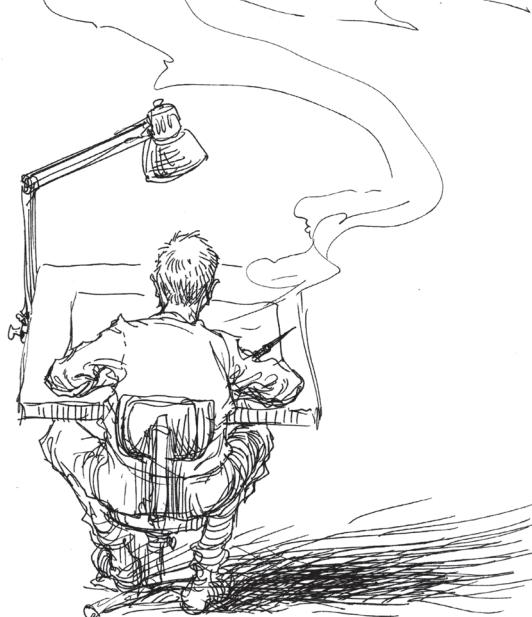
At the end of World War 2, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) set out a list of basic protections to stop the horrors of that war ever happening again. They were meant to be timeless and enduring rights and freedoms that should be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere. In *Here I Stand* we recognise and understand these rights – and see how important it is to promote them.

## The Importance of Screams by Christie Watson

This story highlights the need to end female genital mutilation (FGM), an extreme form of gender-violence which violates many human rights including health, freedom from discrimination, freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and, in the worst cases, the right to life.

'Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind' (UDHR, Article 2).

- Labi's mum says 'Tell girls to shout,' and 'Silence is dangerous'. What does she mean?
- Toni falls in the water and her sister's screams save her. What does this symbolise? What is Christie Watson telling us to do?
- What does the narrator learn from Labi's mum? How does their relationship change?
- Are you surprised that FGM is so prevalent in the UK?
- Look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What rights have been denied to girls who have undergone FGM?



## I Believe... by Neil Gaiman and Chris Riddell

In response to the Paris terror attacks, the award-winning illustrator and writer team up to present their thoughts on freedom of speech and imagination.

We all have the right to make up our own minds, think what we want, to say what we like, and nobody should forbid us from doing so. We should be able to share our ideas with other people wherever they live through books, radio, television and in other ways (UDHR, Article 19).

- What kind of ideas is Neil Gaiman referring to?
- What does the skeleton in a cape symbolise?
- How does the last line make you feel?
- How important is freedom of expression to you?
- How does freedom of speech improve a society?



## Glasgow Snow, Constant and Push the Week by Jackie Kay

In each poem, the author presents us with experiences of enjoying the right to asylum – she wrote them after talking to refugees in Scotland. Some kindness and protection is offered in *Glasgow Snow* but there is little dignity or long-term safety. In *Constant* and *Push the Week*, the speakers express their fear, homesickness and loss of identity.

If someone hurts us, we have the right to go to another country and ask it to protect us (UDHR, Article 14).

- In *Glasgow Snow*, what does the poet want the Home Office to do?
- How would you want to be treated?
- In *Constant*, what is the young woman's constant companion? Why?
- In *Push the Week*, the narrator says, 'Even I don't know who I am'. What parts of her identity is she losing as a refugee?
- Look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What rights are the refugees denied?
- What's the emotion that hits you most when you read these poems (loneliness, anger, sadness, regret)? Is there any hope?
- Do you think the image of refugees has changed over the years?
- What questions would you ask a refugee?

## The Invention of Peanut Butter by Matt Haig

In this story, the villagers enjoy all their human rights – and life in general. Then Sol invents peanut butter and everything deteriorates.

'Everyone has the right to take part in the government of their country. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government' (UDHR, Article 21).

- What is good about the village in the beginning? How does it change?
- Sol takes over as leader, does what he wants, when he wants, without thinking of the people who will be affected. Talk about examples of this and how you feel about his behaviour.
- What could he have done differently? Has he learned anything by the end?
- This is partly a story about how tyrants gain power and how society crumbles when stripped of its civil liberties. Discuss.

- Big questions about privacy and surveillance are threaded through the story (introducing watchtowers, making everyone watch each other suspiciously). What is the author trying to say about our lives today?
- Look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and mark the Articles which protect our rights to equality, privacy and democracy.
- How often do people invade your privacy? Consider if CCTV makes a difference to you.
- How much do you value privacy?

## Stay Home by Sita Brahmachari

Ever since her dad died two years ago, Niya has been a young carer for her grieving mother. What support can they get and will her mother accept it?

'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for... health and well-being' (UDHR, Article 25). 'Everyone has the right to education' (UDHR, Article 26).

- What challenges does Niya face as a young carer?
- What impression do you have of the relationships between mother, daughter, doctor? Why?
- What is the impact on Niya? How does this make you feel?
- Why does Niya feel she has to 'toughen up'?
- How does writing a poem help her?
- When she tells her mother she won't translate for her anymore, what is she really trying to say?
- Look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Which rights have been cast aside at the beginning of the story – and regained by the end?

## A Suicide Bomber Sits in the Library by Jack Gantos

Books move us, make us feel alive, inspire and encourage ideas in all sorts of ways. The author imagines a library where people enjoy reading, feeling and thinking. It transforms one boy's life so he can grow up to enjoy the same rights.

We have the right to make up our own minds, think what we want, to say what we like, and nobody should forbid us from doing so. We should be able to share our ideas with other people wherever they live, through books, radio, television and in other ways (UDHR, Article 19).

- How does the library compare to the world outside?
- 'It is hard to sit still because of the excitement of the day and the honour he has of being chosen to blow up an enemy of his people.' What do you think of this line?
- Why does the boy change his mind?
- How do you feel about the boy at the beginning of the story – and at the end?
- Why are leaders afraid of the power of books?
- How important is it to be able to think for ourselves?

## WHEN HUMAN RIGHTS ARE DEFENDED

Both individuals and governments should try their best to make sure that these rights are fully respected both in their own country and across the world.  
Preamble, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Ordinary people around the world act as human rights defenders. They stand up for people, and stand up to injustice, often at great personal risk. Many of the characters and voices in *Here I Stand* defend, support and protect people. This solidarity is key to defending human rights.

## Harmless Joe by Tony Birch

This is a story about people who are pushed to the margins of society – and are stripped of their humanity – and those with the courage to protect them.

We all have duties towards the community within which we ourselves can fully develop. The law should guarantee human rights and should allow everyone to respect others and to be respected (UDHR, Article 29).

- Many of the characters show courage, compassion and conviction (Gran, Tyrone, Harmless Joe...). How?
- Why do the wild boys and Charlie hurt people?
- Tyrone, Harmless Joe, Rita – how are their lives similar? Are you surprised by their courage?
- Tyrone is called 'imbecile' and 'slow'. How do you think he feels?
- What do you hope for Rita's baby?
- Read *What I Remember About Her* by AL Kennedy, in which a girl is picked on and no-one defends her. Does her plight remind you of what happened to Harmless Joe and Tyrone? Why?
- How have your friends helped you in difficult times?
- Does it take courage to resist negative peer pressure?
- Have you ever stood up to someone who was being picked on or treated unfairly?
- What did you learn from this story?

## Redemption by Ryan Gattis

A lawyer visits his client in a San Francisco prison and is forced to consider the death penalty and how prison could be better. This story was inspired by the author's real-life correspondence with a man on death row. In the USA, 28 people were executed in 2015, and 2,943 prisoners are currently on death row (as of 1 January 2016).

We all have the right to live, and to live in freedom and safety (Article 3).

- Why don't we know the prisoner's name?
- How does the description of San Quentin make you feel? What do you notice?
- Did reading this story change your view on prisons and the death penalty? What did you learn?
- What would you change about prison?
- 'He's a better human than when he got locked up.' What do you think of the idea of redemption for criminals?
- When the pair say goodbye to each other, how are you left feeling?

## Bystander by Frances Hardinge

We often think of witch trials as a historical human rights abuse, but this story looks at the abuse of a girl accused of being a witch in 21st century Britain. It was inspired by the case of Kevani Kanda, who was similarly tortured by her family and is now a campaigner for children suffering abuse of this kind.

Nobody has the right to hurt us or to torture us (UDHR, Article 5).

- How many different examples of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are referred to in this story? Write a list.
- In her nightmares, Kay imagines being on trial as a witch. Talk about what she describes as the worst part of it all (that nobody will stop it or speak up for her and save her).
- Kay's mum says: 'It's another culture. We can't get involved.' Is she right?
- 'I was starting to realise that adults didn't always solve things.' (Kay). How does this make you feel?
- At the end, do you think Kay is a coward? If yes, what would it take to be brave?
- What would you have done in the same situation? Who should have done something, and what?
- Who does the title *Bystander* refer to?

## Deeds Not Words

by Mary and Bryan Talbot, and Kate Charlesworth

Based on the story of two prominent British suffragettes, this graphic novel illustrates the brutal treatment they endured while struggling to gain equal rights for women.

'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (UDHR, Article 1). Nobody has the right to hurt us or to torture us (UDHR, Article 5).

- How much did you know about the suffragettes before you read this story? What have you learned?
- What are effective forms of protest today? (For example, writing letters, speaking out, voting, joining campaigns, attending demonstrations).
- How far would you go for a cause that's important to you? What injustices do you care about?
- More than 100 years has passed since this happened. Why is it important to still tell these stories?
- Is life different for women and girls today? Consider equal pay, women in leadership positions, domestic violence, FGM.
- Does it surprise you that people today are in prison for calling for free speech, and detainees are still being tortured? Why?



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## Darling and Black and White by Amy Leon

Amy Leon explores racial inequality and discrimination but also celebrates responding to this injustice with courage and grace.

'Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind' (UDHR, Article 2).

- How did you feel when reading *Darling*?
- Do you recognise the discrimination and privilege described in *Black and White* because of your own experience or because of things you have seen or heard?
- Both poems reflect an American experience of racism. Do you think it's different in the UK?
- Having read the last lines of *Black and White*, who do you think should talk, what should they say and to whom?
- In *Black and White*, replace the words 'boy' and 'man' with 'girl' and 'woman'. Does anything change?

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## Speaking Out for Freedom by Chelsea Manning

What information should be freely available is one of the most debated questions of the 21st century. In 2010 Chelsea Manning leaked classified information gained while working as a security analyst for the US army – and is now serving 35 years in prison as a result. She reveals her thoughts and motivation in this interview.

'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and to seek, receive and impart information through any media and regardless of frontiers' (UDHR, Article 19).

- What did you learn about Chelsea Manning? Did anything surprise you?
- Why did she make this information public?
- Would you have done the same?
- Should people be free to tell their country's national secrets? If yes, in what situations?
- Does she deserve her punishment?
- What would you say to someone who is afraid to speak out against injustice?

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## Dulce et Decorum Est by Chibundu Onuzo

A 14-year-old boy is coerced into joining a gang's attempted burglary – will he cover for them in court? The author looks at issues of a fair trial when society is not equal, and lives that are locked into and ruined by 'honour' cultures.

If we are accused of breaking the law, we have the right to a fair and public trial. The people who try us should not let themselves be influenced by others (UDHR, Article 10).

- What does the title mean and why has the author chosen it? Have you seen it anywhere else?
- What parallels is the author drawing between gangs and child soldiers?
- Why do people join gangs?
- Is gang violence a problem in your community?
- Who do you agree with when Ladi and Derebo argue about Matthew?
- Why are judges more likely to be male and white?
- Are you surprised by what Alistair says at the end? 'I suppose he thought he was being honourable. My gang, right or wrong. If he had been in the army, we'd have given him a medal for courage.'

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## Robot Killers by Tim Wynne-Jones

Rock band Drone are renamed Robot Killers – and so the author explores the development of weapons that are able to choose and attack targets without further human intervention.

We all have the right to live in peace and order so that all these rights and freedoms are protected, and we can enjoy them in our own country and all over the world (UDHR, Article 28).

- Why is Estelle so angry?
- How can a robot distinguish between right and wrong?
- If you delegate life or death decisions to a robot, does this make it easier to turn your backs on the suffering?
- Who is morally responsible if a robot kills innocent civilians and children?
- What does the author hope for?
- How can music make the world a better place?
- What can you do if you feel outraged by injustice?

# WHEN HUMAN RIGHTS ARE VIOLATED

**Disrespect for human rights has led to horrific acts that have outraged people across the world. We all want a world where people can enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want.**

Preamble, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was written in 1948 following the horrors of World War 2 with a determination to protect the rights of all human beings. However, people still have their rights violated. *Here I Stand* presents experiences of people who have faced discrimination, violence and injustice. Amnesty International works to expose such abuses and defend those affected.

## Harvester Road by John Boyne

**This story looks at different experiences of child sex abuse told through the eyes of children and adults, and emphasises the importance of creating a society in which we are all safe.**

**We all have the right to live, and to live in freedom and safety (Article 3).**

- What do all the stories have in common? And how are they connected?
- What do you want to say to the characters?
- Why does the author give their ages?
- What is the impact of hearing from both adults and children?
- Did it end the way you expected? The way you hoped?
- Stephen says ‘I won’t forget Damien in a hurry.’ How do you feel about Damien?
- Which other characters will you remember vividly?

## Sludge by Sarah Crossan

**In this story an entire way of life is devastated by an oil company’s irresponsibility. Corporations and governments have a responsibility to protect people.**

**‘Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for... health and well-being’ (Article 25).**

- How does the oil spill affect each member of Rax’s family?
- Do you think they are right to leave?
- Why doesn’t Rax say goodbye to Sula?
- Why is the father facing an impossible choice?
- What would you do in this situation?

## Love is a Word Not a Sentence by Liz Kessler

**Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people experience discrimination every day. In some countries consensual same-sex relations are illegal, dangerous, even punishable by death. Even when it isn’t a crime, social attitudes often encourage discrimination, harassment and violence against people thought to be LGBTI. Homophobic bullying in schools in the UK was the inspiration for this story.**

**‘Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind’ (UDHR, Article 2).**

- How do you feel about Gabby’s treatment of Jess? Why does she bully her to such an extreme?
- The author uses offensive language in the book, such as ‘dyke’ and ‘filthy lezzer’ – do you think she’s right to use it in this context, even if it causes offence?
- Why does no one challenge the attacks, harassment and humiliation?
- Why does Jess feel unable to talk to her parents about what’s really going on?
- How would Gabby feel after reading this letter from Jess?
- Are you surprised by Jess’s final decision? Is Gabby’s apology convincing?
- How does your school react to bullying? What suggestions would you make to your school?

## What I Remember About Her by AL Kennedy

This poignant story about bullying raises the question: is observing and not acting tantamount to condoning this behaviour?

'No governments, groups or individuals should destroy any of these rights or freedoms' (Article 30).

- What do you think happened to the girl?
- 'People who aren't right stand out.' Why does seeming 'different' make people a target for bullying?
- 'Anything bad was Dobby's choice.' Do you believe that? Or can you be guilty if you don't say or do anything to help or challenge a situation?
- How can we tell that the narrator knew what the impact of the bullying was? Do you blame the narrator/anyone?
- What similarities and differences are there between this story and *Harmless Joe* by Tony Birch?

## Barley Wine by Kevin Brooks

A young man who has lost his way takes stock of his bleak life. Why does life offer different opportunities to different people?

The society in which we live should help everyone to develop and to make the most of all the advantages (culture, work, social welfare) that are offered to us and to all the men and women in our country (UDHR, Article 22).

- The narrator says things like 'I feel so small it frightens me' and 'I'm invisible.' Why?
- Does he assume that Zina will judge him? Why? Do you judge him?
- How do you think the narrator sees himself and his future?
- Do you believe him when he says, 'I can do what I want. I'm young. I can choose.' Does he have fewer opportunities than others? Why?
- What does this ending leave you thinking?

## When the Corridors Echo by Sabrina Mahfouz

Sabrina Mahfouz illustrates how prejudice and today's fear of terrorism causes adults to criminalise young people and how it affects their everyday lives and freedom.

The law is the same for everyone. It must treat us all fairly (UDHR, Article 7).

- What do you think about Zayd being given an ASBO?
- Zayd and Ayesha's friendship is typed into the Ones to Watch box. What assumptions are being made and why?
- Do you blame the adults for jumping to conclusions about the pair being potential terrorists?
- How did the ending make you feel?
- What is the author trying to make you think about and question?

## School of Life by Elizabeth Laird

The author takes us into the dark, violent world of sex trafficking where girls and women are held prisoner, bought and sold and forced into prostitution. Before writing this story, the author met young Pakistani boys trafficked in the UAE.

Nobody has the right to treat anyone else as their slave, and we cannot make anyone our slave (UDHR, Article 4).

- Why does Katya trust Andrei?
- 'Andrei had sold me for money, like a dog, or a piece of meat.' What do you think of the brutality of that line?
- How did Katya and Maria get pulled or pushed into this situation?
- The story explores a widespread and vicious trade in trafficked girls, some very young, into our own country. How does that make you feel?
- What factors enable trafficking to exist?
- What do you hope happens next?
- Which rights from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are being violated in the case of Katya and Maria?

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## The Colour of Humanity

by Bali Rai

**The children enjoy the rights to equality and safety, living simple, fun childhood days. Then something changes and we witness the most horrific racism with appalling consequences. Bali Rai's story was inspired by the tragic death of Liverpool teenager Anthony Walker in 2005, at the hands of racists.**

These rights belong to everybody whether we are rich or poor, whatever country we live in, whatever sex or whatever colour we are, whatever language we speak, whatever social group we come from, whatever we think or whatever we believe (UDHR, Article 2).

- The boys are best friends until... What changes?
  - Why does 'hate take root'?
  - The narrator's friend is influenced by a gang of boys. Why do you think he listens to them? Can anything be done to change people who try to influence others like this?
  - How do both boys lose as a result of the attack?
  - Does degrading someone else degrade us too?
  - How does abuse make it worse for everyone – not just one side?
  - Have you ever done anything to help stamp out racism? What's the best way to do this?
  - Why does racism still persist?
-