Exploring Australia’s democratic freedoms

OFFERING ENGAGING, INTERACTIVE LESSONS FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS ACROSS AUSTRALIA, A NEW ONLINE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE ALLOWS TEACHERS TO EXPLORE THE NATION’S DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS WITH THEIR CLASSES.

Created through a partnership between education not-for-profit Cool Australia and the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), The Story of Our Rights and Freedoms is linked to the Australian Curriculum.

Cool Australia helps teachers find fun ways to critically engage, involve and switch on young Australians to learn for life. The organisation offers 1200-plus free online lessons as well as 40-plus affordable professional development courses for early learning, primary and secondary educators.

Head of Education, Chris Vella, said the 18-lesson unit for Years 7-10 will broaden students’ understanding of democracy and its function throughout history with captivating curriculum for history, and civics and citizenship classes.

“Students need a deep understanding of democracy if they are to become active and informed citizens. All the lessons include videos and activities about human rights with a focus on relevant legislation and particular issues that affect people both locally and internationally,” he explained.

Cool Australia first teamed up with the AHRC in 2016 to launch Magna Carta – primary and secondary lessons exploring the evolution of democratic ideas and principles stemming from the Magna Carta.

“This experience showed us that teachers and students are hungry for more engaging content in this area,” Mr Vella says. “We strengthened this partnership and have worked together to create another 18 free lessons that explore key features of the Australian government, and how those systems act to protect the rights and freedoms of all Australians.”

The launch of the Story of Our Rights and Freedoms coincides with the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the defining document for human rights in the modern age.

AHRC President, Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher AO, says education has the power to bring about positive change in communities across Australia. “Our newest series of resources,
developed in partnership with the curriculum experts at Cool Australia, will support Australian teachers and students to deepen their understanding of the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and some of the other core elements that underpin the protection of our rights and freedoms in Australia today.

The Story of Our Rights and Freedoms package is organised into units for each year level.

Year 7 lessons explore key features of our government, and how those systems act to protect the rights and freedoms of all Australians. The lesson Constitutional Referendum in Action makes connections between the referendum process and our rights and freedoms. Students role play the constitutional process from the moment a citizen raises a concern, through to voting “yes” or “no” in a referendum.

For Year 8 classes, students look at the rights of citizens and how we can actively and responsibly participate in democracy. The lesson Democratic Dissent considers the democratic right to vote, and what it feels like to be excluded from it. Students work in groups to research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and women – two groups that struggled for the right to vote.

The Year 9 lessons examine systems of government and how our rights and freedoms are enshrined within them. In the lesson Understanding Conciliation, students consider what discrimination is and how it can be addressed. They look at discrimination case studies and explore situations where reconciliation could be effective.

Year 10 classes explore the transformation of the world throughout the 20th century, with a focus on the demand for and realisation of rights and freedoms. The lesson Struggle for Rights and Freedoms Around the World focuses on the African American civil rights movement. Students organise key events within the USA civil rights movement into chronological order. They research significant figures and create exhibits for a class gallery walk.

During the lesson The Struggle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights and Freedoms, students engage in a Socratic Seminar to discuss the influence of Charles Perkins on the struggle for rights. They also research the events that prompted the National Apology to the Stolen Generations.

The Story of Our Rights and Freedoms lessons are built with accessibility in mind and are compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0.

Like all Cool Australia lessons, this package builds 21st century skills to help young people to connect and contribute to an ever-changing world.

The lessons develop critical thinking, empathy, teamwork and cultural understanding. Importantly, students are taught to consider how their decisions impact on other people.

“Each lesson involves a range of dynamic activities that encourage students to communicate, collaborate, and take initiative to become more engaged citizens,” added Mr Vella. “The aim is for students to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills to apply human rights in everyday life.”

For more information
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