



Amnesty International

# LETTERS TO DEATH ROW

A human rights education resource to accompany the film *Letters to Death Row* for teachers of KS3 and KS4 Citizenship and related subjects

**TEACHERS TV RESOURCE**

[www.amnesty.org.uk/education](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/education)

**PROTECT THE HUMAN**

**CONTENTS**



<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Lesson outline</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ACTIVITY 1</b> Death penalty quiz	5
<b>ACTIVITY 2</b> Film Letters to Death Row	7
<b>ACTIVITY 3</b> The impact of death row on the families of prisoners and victims	9
<b>ACTIVITY 4</b> The impact of taking action	10
<b>REVIEW AND CLOSE</b>	12
<b>EXTENSION ACTIVITY/HOMEWORK</b> Greetings Card Campaign	13
<b>Curriculum links</b>	<b>15</b>
England	15
Northern Ireland	17
Scotland	18
Wales	18



## INTRODUCTION

‘Living each day knowing that you may be sent to your death at any given month, day or moment is torture. Being on death row dehumanises and has a massive psychological effect on a person. It’s an awful penalty to inflict on anyone, and is even more devastating for someone who is innocent.’

*Sakae Menda, first Japanese prisoner to be released from death row, speaking in 2007 to the United Nations*

Sixty-four<sup>1</sup> countries and territories across the world retain and use the death penalty, but the number of countries that actually execute people is much smaller.

The death penalty violates the right to life. It is irrevocable and has been inflicted on the innocent. The death penalty has never been shown to deter crime more effectively than other punishments. The most recent survey of research findings on the relation between the death penalty and homicide rates, conducted for the United Nations in 1988 and updated in 2002, concluded:

...it is not prudent to accept the hypothesis that capital punishment deters murder to a marginally greater extent than does the threat and application of the supposedly lesser punishment of life imprisonment.<sup>2</sup>

Since 1977 a total of 133 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Since 1990, only four of these abolitionist countries reintroduced the death penalty and two of them – Nepal and the Philippines – have since abolished it again. There have been no executions in the other two (Gambia and Papua New Guinea).

International human rights treaties prohibit anyone under 18 years old at the time of the crime being sentenced to death or executed. However, a small number of countries continue to execute child offenders.

Amnesty International works for an end to executions and the abolition of the death penalty everywhere.

### About this resource

This resource contains materials for one lesson, and includes some extension activities for homework or for another lesson. The activities can be used in a stand-alone lesson or can be incorporated into a scheme of work on related themes.

The resource has been designed for use in conjunction with the Teachers TV short film *Letters to Death Row* made with support from Amnesty International. The film is linked to the curriculum in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the links are outlined at the end of the document.

<sup>1</sup> All facts and figures used in this lesson can be accessed on <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/deathpenalty-facts-eng>  
<sup>2</sup> Roger Hood, *The Death Penalty: A World-wide Perspective*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, third edition, 2002, p230, taken from <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/deathpenalty-facts-eng>



## Learning objectives

To be introduced to/review articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

To learn about the death penalty

To explore this topical issue and to contribute to group discussions

To use imagination and empathy to explore experiences other than one's own

To be introduced to the work of international organisations

## Resources

In addition to copies of the activity sheets provided, you will need

- a flipchart
- a whiteboard/interactive board

## Human rights

The following articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) are relevant to this activity:

**Article 3** Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

**Article 5** No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

**Article 7** All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.

**Article 9** No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

**Article 10** Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal.

**Article 19** Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

**Article 26** Everyone has the right to education.

# LESSON OUTLINE

## LETTERS TO DEATH ROW



### Introduction

Tell the class they are going to explore the death penalty in this lesson. Explain that they are going to complete a quiz on the topic to help them focus on the issue. The quiz will be followed by a film, group discussions and activities.

### ACTIVITY 1

## DEATH PENALTY QUIZ

(10 MINUTES)

Distribute Activity Sheet A, 'Death penalty quiz', either individually or to groups. Explain that they have 5 minutes to complete the task.

After completing the quiz, run through the correct answers. Some of the class may not have answered the questions correctly, and some may be surprised by the answers to the questions. Allow for a short discussion, to clear student responses.

Explain to the class that the lesson will focus on this topic, so they can learn and understand more about the death penalty and its impact on individuals, their families and friends, and the wider community.

### Death penalty quiz: Answers

1. Can you list the six main methods of execution?
  1. Beheading
  2. Electrocutation
  3. Hanging
  4. Lethal injection
  5. Shooting
  6. Stoning
2. In 2006, how many executions were there? **At least 1,591**
3. Circle the country that you think does not practise the death penalty: **France**
4. What year was the last execution in the UK? **1964**
5. What year did the UK formally abolish the death penalty for all crimes? **1998**

## ACTIVITY SHEET A

# DEATH PENALTY QUIZ



Circle the answer that you think is correct for each question below.

1. Can you list the six main methods of execution?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

2. In 2006, how many executions were there? At least:

252      1,591      225,467

3. Circle the country that you think does not practise the death penalty.

- USA
- Iran
- China
- France
- Sudan

4. What year was the last execution in the UK?

1900      1964      1985

5. What year did the UK formally abolish the death penalty for all crimes?

1945      1998      2005

## ACTIVITY 2

# FILM LETTERS TO DEATH ROW

(25 MINUTES)



Introduce the film *Letters to Death Row*, explaining that it was made with support from Amnesty International and shows cases or stories of three people from around the world, whose lives have been dramatically affected by being imprisoned unfairly, or being placed on death row. Stress that the film is quite emotive.

Distribute Activity Sheet B as a handout. Read it through and explain it to the students. Explain that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a list of human rights that should be enjoyed by all humans. However, they will see in the film that certain human rights are denied in some cases. Explain that they will also see certain human rights being enjoyed. (To see the full list of articles go to <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.pdf>)

Invite students to tick the correct boxes on the sheet, when they note a human right being enjoyed or denied as they watch the film.

### Show the film (15 minutes).

Certain students may be moved by the power of the three stories in the film. Check with the students that they have recovered emotionally following the viewing by asking them to suggest adjectives or other words that describe how they feel after watching the film. Make a list of the words on a flipchart.

Review Activity Sheet B. Check that students are aware of which abuses have been abused/enjoyed. Deal with any questions.

Remind students that they can exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression, and that they can exercise this right whether they feel that the death penalty is right or whether they think it is wrong.

Inform students that they will be looking at ways of exercising this right, if they feel the death penalty is wrong, at the end of the session.

## ACTIVITY SHEET B

# FILM LETTERS TO DEATH ROW



While you are watching the film tick the human rights you believe are being denied or enjoyed.

	Tahir	Tahir	Maria	Maria	Delara	Delara
<b>Selected articles from Universal Declaration of Human Rights</b>	<b>Human right denied</b>	<b>Human right enjoyed</b>	<b>Human right denied</b>	<b>Human right enjoyed</b>	<b>Human right denied</b>	<b>Human right enjoyed</b>
Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person						
All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law						
No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile						
Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression						
Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal						
Everyone has the right to education						
No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment						



### ACTIVITY 3

## THE IMPACT OF DEATH ROW ON THE FAMILIES OF PRISONERS AND VICTIMS

(15 MINUTES)



This activity will help the students review the impact of the death penalty on the families of death row prisoners and the families of those who have been victims of a serious crime. This activity should be used to encourage a balanced view of the topic. Divide the class in two, and ask each group to focus on the questions below.

#### GROUP 1:

Imagine that you are a brother or sister of someone on death row. Answer the following questions in your small groups.

- How do you feel knowing that your brother or sister has been put on death row?
- What does it feel like for you, who have your freedom, knowing that your brother or sister does not?
- What actions have you taken and are thinking of taking to have their case reviewed?

#### GROUP 2:

Imagine that you are a brother or sister of the victim of a serious crime. Someone has been convicted of the crime and has been sentenced to death. That person is now on death row. Answer the following questions in your small groups.

- How do you feel knowing that your brother or sister has been the victim of a serious crime?
- What has been the impact on your life?
- What do you think about the fact that someone has been convicted of the crime, and is on death row?

As a whole group ask the students how they felt being in the 'shoes' of both sides of the experience of crime and punishment. Encourage them to think about the emotional, physical, financial and moral considerations from both sides.

## ACTIVITY 4

# THE IMPACT OF TAKING ACTION

(5 MINUTES)



Writing appeal letters, gathering names on a petition, creative demonstrations and other actions move students' learning beyond theory and discussion and offer a chance to exercise active citizenship. To ensure that any action taken is informed action, it should always follow exploration and discussion of the issue at hand.

The film gives first hand testimony to the emotional and psychological support that people on death row can gain when they receive letters from the outside world. Students will address the power of letter writing in this part of the lesson. You may wish to invite the students to use Amnesty International's Greeting Cards Campaign (1 November-31 January) as an opportunity to take action. This can be carried out as an extension activity or as a homework exercise.

Ask the students to suggest what the benefits were to Maria and Tahir, in the film, of the actions taken on their behalf. List the suggestions on a flipchart. Suggestions could include:

- They received better treatment.
- They were eventually released.
- It gave them hope.
- They didn't feel alone.
- It made them emotionally more relaxed.
- They knew they weren't forgotten.

Ask them to think about the type of actions that could be taken to support Delara Darabi (the third prisoner in the film).

Ask the students what the possible benefits these could have for her and her family. List their suggestions on a flipchart.

You may find it useful to provide them with some more background information on Delara (see below).

Invite the students to decide individually if they would like to carry out any actions for Delara or another person on death row, or if they wish to take part in the Greeting Cards Campaign that Amnesty runs every year (extension activity/homework).

### Delara Darabi

According to reports Delara Darabi and a 19-year-old man named Amir Hossein broke into the house of an elderly relative of Delara Darabi's to steal from her. Amir Hossein allegedly killed the woman during the burglary.

Delara Darabi initially confessed to the murder but later retracted her confession. She said that she had been asked to admit responsibility for the murder by Amir Hossein, who believed that as she was a minor she wouldn't be executed.

Delara was initially sentenced to death in 2005, but the Supreme Court later found 'deficiencies' in her case, and it was sent for retrial. Further trial sessions took place in January and June 2006, after which Delara was sentenced to

death for a second time. In April 2007 Amnesty learned that the sentence of death had been upheld by the Supreme Court.

In January 2007 Delara Darabi reportedly tried to commit suicide but was saved by cell-mates who alerted the authorities. Amnesty International is extremely concerned about her mental and physical health. She is currently held in Rasht prison, in the northern province of Gilan, where conditions are reportedly very difficult. Her family has requested that she be transferred to another prison.



## REVIEW AND CLOSE

(5 MINUTES)



Remind the students of the key learning points from the lesson:

- The UDHR is a collection of rights that every human being should have.
- The death penalty is retained in 64 countries and territories across the world.
- Being detained on death row, or subject to torture, has immense physical and psychological consequences on those detained and their families.
- Students can exercise their right to freedom of expression by taking action for people on death row or subject to torture.
- Amnesty International works for an end to executions and the abolition of the death penalty everywhere.

### Useful websites:

[www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk)

[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

[www.worldcoalition.org/modules/accueil/](http://www.worldcoalition.org/modules/accueil/)

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY/HOMEWORK GREETINGS CARD CAMPAIGN



Amnesty International's annual Greetings Card Campaign brings people across the world in touch with each other in a simple way: sending a card with a friendly greeting or message of solidarity to someone who is in danger or unjustly imprisoned. These are prisoners of conscience, people under sentence of death, human rights defenders under threat because of their work, and others at risk.

The campaign, which runs from 1 November to 31 January, offers hope and encouragement to the people who receive our cards. It can also help bring about change: the impression their international mail makes on police, prison staff or political authorities can help keep them safe. It is still possible to take action for the people featured in the campaign after 31 January.

Amnesty International has developed some guidelines to support those taking action.

Distribute Activity Sheet C 'Guidelines for the Greetings Cards Campaign'. Ask the students to read through it as a group or independently.

Ask them:

- Why do you think Amnesty International has produced these guidelines?
- Why do you think it's important not to mention Amnesty in the messages?
- Why do you think Amnesty asks you not to send religious cards?
- Why shouldn't you mention any political issues?

Invite the students to take an action that they feel is appropriate for them.

Suggestions can be found on the Amnesty International UK website:

[www.amnesty.org.uk/youthaction](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/youthaction)

[www.amnesty.org.uk/actions](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions)

To get involved in the Greeting Card Campaign, go to:

[www.amnesty.org.uk/gcc](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/gcc)

## ACTIVITY SHEET C

# GUIDELINES FOR THE GREETINGS CARD CAMPAIGN



- Do not use cards with Amnesty's name or logo, or mention Amnesty in your message (unless otherwise stated).
- Simple messages of goodwill are enough. Never include political comments.
- As a rule, only send non-religious cards. In cases where we say religious cards can be sent, you may send either a card of any religion or a card of a specific religion as directed, without causing offence or posing a threat. When a non-religious card is advised, avoid referring to religion in your message. For example, rather than writing 'you are in our prayers', write 'you are in our thoughts'.
- Put your name, and school address (including country) on your card, except if we specifically ask you not to. If you receive a reply please send a copy to Amnesty International.
- Write your message in English or your first language. Only write in the recipient's language if you are confident your message will be accurate.
- Take note of the instructions for addressing your card.
- Use airmail stickers for sending cards overseas.

## CURRICULUM LINKS



### England

#### KS 3 Citizenship

During Key Stage 3 pupils study, reflect upon and discuss topical political, spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues, problems and events.

##### 1. Knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens

Students should be taught about:

- a. the legal and human rights and responsibilities underpinning society, basic aspects of the criminal justice system and how both relate to young people
- f. the work of community based, national and international voluntary groups

##### 2. Developing skills of enquiry and communication

Students should be taught to:

- b. express, justify and defend orally and in writing a personal opinion about such issues, problems or events
- c. contribute to group and exploratory class discussions and take part in debates

##### 3. Developing skills of participation and responsible action

Students should be taught to:

- a. use their imagination to consider other people's experiences and be able to think about, express, explain and critically evaluate views that are not their own
- c. reflect on the process of participating

#### KS4 Citizenship

During Key Stage 4 students continue to study, think about and discuss topical political, spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues, problems and events.

##### 1. Knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens

Students should be taught about:

- a. the legal and human rights and responsibilities underpinning society and how they relate to citizens, including the role and operation of the criminal and civil justice systems
- f. the opportunities for individuals and voluntary groups to bring about social change locally, nationally, in Europe and internationally

## 2. Developing skills of enquiry and communication

Students should be taught to:

- b. express, justify and defend orally and in writing a personal opinion about such issues, problems or events
- c. contribute to group and exploratory class discussions, and take part in formal debates

## 3. Developing skills of participation and responsible action

Students should be taught to:

- b. use their imagination to consider other people's experiences and be able to think about, express, explain and critically evaluate views that are not their own
- c. reflect on the process of participating







## Northern Ireland

Curriculum links relate to the current guidelines for the Revised Curriculum in Northern Ireland.

### KS3: Learning for Life and Work:

#### Local and Global Citizenship

#### Key Concept – Human Rights and Social Responsibility

Pupils should have opportunities to:

- Investigate why it is important to uphold human rights standards in modern democratic societies, including meeting basic needs, protecting individuals and groups of people
- Investigate key human rights principles
- Investigate why different rights must be limited or balanced in our society
- Investigate local and global scenarios where human rights have been seriously infringed
- Investigate the principles of social responsibility and the role of individuals, society and government in promoting these, for example, in relation to addressing the issues raised across the key concepts

### KS4 Learning for Life and Work:

#### Local and Global Citizenship

#### Key Concept – Human Rights and Social Responsibility

Pupils should have opportunities to:

- Investigate why it is important to uphold human rights standards in modern democratic societies, including meeting basic needs, protecting individuals and groups of people.
- Investigate key human rights principles
- Investigate why different rights must be limited or balanced in our society.
- Investigate local and global scenarios where human rights have been seriously infringed.



## Scotland

Curriculum links relate to the current guidelines for the new Curriculum for Excellence.

The activities support the development of students as:

Successful learners able to:

- Learn independently and as part of a group
- Make reasoned evaluations

Responsible citizens able to:

- Make informed choices and decisions
- Develop informed ethical views of complex issues

## Wales

### PSE KS 3

#### Attitudes and Values

- Value cultural diversity and equal opportunity and respect the dignity of all
- Be moved by injustice, exploitation and denial of human rights

#### Skills

- Listen attentively in different situations and respond appropriately
- Communicate confidently one's feelings and views and maintain with conviction a personal standpoint
- Empathise with other's experiences and feelings
- Use a range of techniques for personal reflection
- Make moral judgements and resolve moral issues and dilemmas
- Work both independently and cooperatively
- Take part in debates and vote on issues

#### Knowledge and Understanding

##### Community Aspect

- Understand the nature of local, national and international communities with reference to cultural diversity, justice, law and order and interdependence

##### Emotional Aspect

- Identify the range of emotions and feelings they experience and understand the 'self talk' involved



## Moral Aspect

- Recognise moral issues and dilemmas in life situations
- Know what they believe to be right and wrong actions and understand the issues involved

## PSHE 4

### Attitudes and Values

- Value cultural diversity and equal opportunity and respect the dignity of all
- Be moved by injustice, exploitation and denial of human rights

### Skills

- Listen attentively in different situations and respond appropriately
- Communicate confidently one's feelings and views and maintain with conviction a personal standpoint
- Use a range of techniques for personal reflection
- Make moral judgements and resolve moral issues and dilemmas
- Work both independently and cooperatively

### Knowledge and Understanding

#### Community Aspect

- Know how democratic systems work and understand how individual citizens, public opinion, lobby groups, and the media can contribute and have an influence and impact
- Have a developing global awareness of contemporary issues and events including human rights and sustainable development

