

## USING FICTION TO TEACH HUMAN RIGHTS

# NOUGHTS AND CROSSES SERIES

by Malorie Blackman

**Random House**  
(Lower secondary)



Malorie Blackman is the author of the critically acclaimed *Noughts and Crosses* series. Set in a hostile alternative society, the pale-skinned Noughts are treated as inferiors by the ruling dark-skinned Crosses. The Noughts are continually discriminated against in matters of civil rights and education and consequently their jobs, access to healthcare and places of entertainment. Their colour also affects friendships.

The first book *Noughts and Crosses* revolves around Callum (a Nought) and Sephy (a Cross). In their world of prejudice and distrust, highlighted by violent terrorist activity by Noughts, they don't fit. But a childhood friendship has grown into an intense love which descends to its fatal conclusion. The story continues into the next generation over the next three books.

### BACKGROUND

Author Malorie Blackman wanted to write a book about slavery, race and racism, and called it *Noughts and Crosses* because it's a game that 'once you've grasped its objective and tactics, it invariably ends in a draw – a no-win situation. I think that pretty much sums up racism. Ultimately no one wins.'

Amnesty International says: 'Discrimination is an assault on the very notion of human rights. Discrimination is the systematic denial of certain peoples' or groups' full human rights because of who they are or what they believe. It is all too easy to deny a person's human rights if you consider them as "less than human".'

The drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) stated explicitly that they considered non-discrimination to be the basis of the Declaration.

Malorie Blackman's novels brilliantly illustrate how prejudice and discrimination curtail people's access to human rights.

### UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

**Article 1:** We are all born free and equal. We all have our own thoughts and ideas. We should all be treated in the same way.

**Article 2:** These rights belong to everybody, whatever our differences.

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

**Article 7:** The law is the same for everyone. It must treat us all fairly.

**Article 19:** We all have the right to make up our own minds, to think what we like, to say what we think, and to share our ideas with other people.

**Article 25:** We all have the right to enough food, clothing, housing and health care.

**Article 26:** We all have the right to education.

**Article 29:** We have a duty to other people, and we should protect their rights and freedoms.

## SUITABILITY

This series of books would suit readers aged 11+.

## CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

### Health and Well-being: Social Well-being

As I explore the rights to which I and others are entitled, I am able to exercise these rights appropriately and accept the responsibilities that go with them. I show respect for the rights of others. (HWB 0-09a up to HWB 4-09a)

Through contributing my views, time and talents, I play a part in bringing about positive change in my school and wider community (HWB 0-13a up to HWB 4-13a)

### Literacy: English

#### Reading: Understanding, analysing and evaluating

To show my understanding across different areas of learning, I can:

- clearly state the purpose, main concerns, concepts or arguments and use supporting detail
- make inferences from key statements and state these accurately in my own words
- compare and contrast different types of text. (LIT 4-16a)

## IDEAS FOR THE CLASSROOM

### Discussion points

1. In *Knife Edge* Jude says: *'Being born a nought shouldn't automatically slam shut myriad doors before you've even drawn your first breath.'* (p.15)

Use examples from the novels to show what doors do slam shut.

What other situations show that some people are or have been deprived of basic rights because of who they are?

2. In *Noughts and Crosses* Sephy shouts: *'You're behaving like animals! Worse than animals – like blankers!'* (p.56). Callum's reaction makes her reflect on her behaviour: *'I hadn't fully realised just how powerful words can be.'* (p.58) Can you think of other examples from the novels where words cause pain and distress? In what other situations can words hurt?

3. In *Check Mate* ten years have passed since Callum's death and things are supposed to have got better. Meggie doesn't agree: *'I used to love swimming at the local baths... Well, did you ever wonder why I stopped going? 'Cause all the cleaners and serving staff at the local pool are all*

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**'It is through literature that we learn to understand and empathise... we can find our place in the world, feel we belong and discover our sense of responsibility. Amnesty understands this very well.'**

Michael Morpurgo

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*Noughts, but the reception staff are all Crosses and the managers are all Crosses. That's why. Since Callie started school, has she had any Nought teachers? I don't think so.'* (p. 114) **Why do you think so little has changed?**

4. In *Knife Edge* Jude uses the argument of the discrimination against the Noughts to defend the violence of the Liberation Militia: *'The media called us ruthless terrorists. We're not. We're just fighting for what's right.'* (p.14) **How far does this justify the actions of the Liberation Militia?**

## DEATH PENALTY

Amnesty International believes that no one – including any government – has the right to take away someone else's life. We're working to end the use of the death penalty around the world, and won't stop until every country in the world has abolished it.

In *Noughts and Crosses* Ryan MacGregor and Callum are sentenced to death and Callum is actually executed. These two cases could be used to explore the arguments against the death penalty. Lesson 7 of Amnesty's resource *Everyone, Everywhere* is a useful introduction to this topic. [amnesty.org.uk/resources/lesson-death-penalty](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/lesson-death-penalty)

## IDENTITY

From the moment we are born, we each have the human right to an identity. It's Article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our identity is the bedrock of a healthy and diverse society.

At its most basic level our identity is our first name, surname, date of birth, gender and nationality. Without this we are invisible to the state and cannot flourish. But our identity is more than a set of documents. It's how we assert our individuality and connects very strongly with our right to freedom of expression. It's of supreme importance to young people on the cusp of adulthood beginning to choose their own path in life. Malorie Blackman explores this as her characters try to find their place in the world.

For more teaching ideas about Human Rights and Fiction go to [amnesty.org.uk/education](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/education)