

Freedom, Responsibility, Connections

This lesson can be used with students from age 7 to 16 by adjusting the level of depth and selecting the suggested quotes appropriately.

Students will be able to:

- Describe why freedom, responsibility, and connections are important to humanists
- Explain some of the challenges freedom and responsibility give rise to
- Describe the impact of our connections with other people and evaluate whether these have the capacity to frustrate or enrich our lives

Resources: 1 metre of string per student

Starter and introduction

Show the Humanists UK logo (the Happy Human)

Ask the students: What does this picture look like? What does it look like the person is doing?

Ask the students to recreate the Humanists UK happy human logo with a piece of string.

Explain

- Humanism is a non-religious worldview.
- **The Happy Human** is used by many humanist organisations as a symbol for **humanism**.
- It is about the celebration of being human.

Show the quotes and discuss.

Introduce freedom and responsibility

Ask the students what do the words 'freedom' and 'responsibility' mean

Explain that **freedom** is important to humanists

Humanists believe...

- We should have the **freedom to think for ourselves**, to reach our own conclusions.
- We should have the **freedom to live** our lives the way we want (as long as we do not cause harm to others or restrict their freedoms) - this is called **personal autonomy**.
- We are fortunate that in the UK we have these freedoms - in many parts of the world people are not so free to choose.

Explain that **responsibility** is also important to humanists (for our own lives and for others)

Humanists believe...

- The freedom to think for ourselves and reach our own conclusions means we have a responsibility to **think carefully about the evidence** for those conclusions.
- We must take responsibility for our own lives, we can't simply let others tell us how to live
- Humanists believe that this is **the one life we have** so we should make the most of it and try to live a good and fulfilling life in the here and now.
- Humanists believe we also have responsibilities towards other people and to consider other animals and the environment.

Activity 1: Freedom

- 1) Point out to the students that their Happy Humans all look quite similar to each other. There is a lot that human beings share. But there are also many ways we differ.
- 2) Model some pictures, using the string, of things that might be meaningful in someone's life (e.g. family, hobbies, or goals), then ask the students to create an image with their string
This could be:
 - a) Something important to them
 - b) Something that makes them happy
 - c) An image of themselves at their best
 - d) How they see themselves in the future
- 3) Ask them to explain their picture to their partner and then ask some to explain their partner's picture back to the rest of the class.

Explain that, for humanists, we can see our own lives as like a piece of string (show the slide).

- Our lives have a beginning and an end (we are mortal).
- We are made from limited materials (we evolved).
- We can, to a certain extent, shape ourselves into who we want to be.
- Our characters can be fluid and flexible.
- We are vulnerable to tying ourselves in knots, fraying, and unravelling.

Point out there are now many different pictures. Explain, for humanists, there is no one-size-fits-all way to be happy in life. Remind the students that the **freedom** to find what makes us happy is important to humanists.

Ask the students how free they think human beings are? What are our biological limitations?

Explain that humanists accept that we have **limitations** - we must work with the material we are given - but they still believe that we can celebrate our many **capacities** (e.g. communication, creativity, empathy, problem solving). Show the quote and discuss.

Ask the students if anyone changed their mind during the activity.

Explain that humanists believe that we should have the freedom to **change** what we believe and how we choose to live as we go through our lives. Show the quotes and discuss.

- Because humanists recognise that we can be wrong and we can make mistakes it is important that human beings are open to change.
- Being open to change allows us to make progress in our understanding of the world and helps us to find what makes us happy and fulfilled.
- It also enables humanity to make progress in our knowledge and in our morality.

Show the quotes and discuss.

Ask the students if any of them can think of any examples of how they have changed.

Ask the students if they can think of any examples of where humanity has made progress in our knowledge or morality.

Explain that we may change over time but we still 'hang together'. Our life has its **story**. For humanists, these connections across our lives can give our life **meaning**. Show the quote and discuss.

Ask the students if it was difficult to decide what to create or to get their picture just right.

Explain that humanists believe that it can be **difficult** to become what we want to be. We might not always succeed. But the challenge can be **rewarding**. Show the quote and discuss.

Activity 2: Responsibility

- 1) Ask the students to tie one end of their string to someone else's wrist. Everyone should be tied to someone else. (The aim is to make the next task difficult for the students.)
- 2) Then ask them to individually create another image of something that is important in their lives. Instruct them not to talk.

Ask them whether it was easy to create the picture they wanted or did their ties to other people make it more difficult to achieve their goal? Did they have to take account of other people?

Explain that humanists believe we need to be aware we are not alone. We are part of society. Our actions have consequences on others and we need to think about this when deciding how to live.

Ask the students if there should be any constraints on our freedom.

Show the quotes and discuss.

Explain

- Humanists recognise and value our freedom, but freedom comes with some **constraints**.
- They believe that we should not be free to harm other people.
- They believe our freedom should not restrict other people's freedoms.

Remind the students that **responsibility** is important to humanists. Show the quotes and discuss.

- We have many connections, whether through immediate relationships or through the consequences our actions can have on others on the other all around the globe.
- We therefore have the responsibility to consider the consequences of our choices on other people and on the rest of the natural world.

Activity 3: Connections

Ask the students whether they think our connections with other people are a good or bad thing? Do these ties frustrate us or can they make our lives richer? Show the quotes and discuss.

Explain

- For humanists, these **connections** need not be seen as restrictions but can be some of the most valuable ingredients in our lives - our relationships can enrich our lives.
- Our connections can limit our freedom, but by working together with those with different talents we can also enhance our capacities and therefore increase our freedom.
- For humanists, who do not believe in an afterlife, our connections with others provides a way for something of us to 'survive' our deaths - through our shared ideas, experiences, and contributions, our lives can continue to have an impact after we are gone.
- Our piece of string may come to an end, but the ripples we make may continue in others.

Ask the students to create a picture as a group using all their strings. Are we capable of greater things when we communicate and work together? This could perhaps be turned into a class display.

Plenary

- Remind the students that, for humanists, we can see our lives as like a piece of string. Humanists believe we are material and mortal, but have the capacity to shape our own lives.
- Ask the students again what the words 'freedom' and 'responsibility' mean and why they are important to humanists. Remind them about what they have learned (see the slide).