

RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

CLASSROOM CHARTERS



CONTENTS

Introduction: Building the Shared Values of a Rights Respecting Classroom.....	1
What is a Classroom Charter?.....	2
What is the Aim of a Classroom Charter?.....	3
In What Way is a Classroom Charter Different from Classroom Rules?.....	3
How Do You Approach the Linking of Rights with Respect for the Rights of Others?	4
Can I Have the Word “Responsibility” as a Heading on the Charter?.....	4
Tips and Ideas for Creating Your Classroom Charter.....	5

ABOUT RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS (RRS)

Rights Respecting Schools (RRS) is an initiative of UNICEF Canada’s Global Classroom program. This initiative uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) as the basis for enhancing an inclusive, participatory and respectful school culture for children and adults.

As a framework for educational improvement, the initiative helps schools address the whole learning environment through a consistent, rights-based approach. It is premised on the understanding that in order for children to want to achieve, they have to feel included, that they belong and that they matter. It brings children into early contact with the universal ideals of respect for oneself and for others, in the school community and in an interdependent world.

rightsrespectingschools.ca



INTRODUCTION: BUILDING THE SHARED VALUES OF A RIGHTS RESPECTING CLASSROOM



Creating a classroom charter is a good way to include students in the decision-making processes of the classroom and to nurture a positive classroom atmosphere. The collaboration between children and adults – in age- and ability-appropriate ways – in the creation of a charter for a rights respecting classroom has proven to be very valuable in making the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) a meaningful guide for interactions and actions on a day-to-day basis.

WHERE TO FIND LESSON PLANS

For K - 4 Teachers

UNICEF Canada's ***Creating a Classroom Charter*** lesson plan is available in the guide *Creating a Rights Respecting Classroom: Engaging Activities and Tools for Grades Kindergarten to Four*, on pages 64-67.

For 4 - 8 Teachers

UNICEF Canada's ***Creating a Classroom Charter*** lesson plan is available in the guide *Creating a Rights Respecting Classroom: Engaging Activities and Tools for Grades Four to Eight*, on pages 64-66.

Source: The activities and ideas for designing a Classroom Charter have been adapted from: UNICEF UK, *Rights Respecting School Award: A Guide to the Award for Primary Schools*, (United Kingdom: UNICEF).

WHAT IS A CLASSROOM CHARTER?

Children and adults of a class select the rights they agree are the most important in relation to what is done in that classroom and they display these on a charter. Then they make agreements to respect those rights for themselves and for others, and everyone signs the charter to show their commitment to its shared values.

The process of developing a charter is as important as the end product. The process must be participatory and inclusive, and must build on the prior learning about the difference between wants and needs.

For young children, charters may be very simple and use images instead of words or in conjunction with them. As children move beyond their early years, they will learn that their rights, as outlined in the Convention, are based on their need to thrive as human beings. At this point it is more common for the classroom charter to specifically reference articles in the Convention.

In learning that these rights are universal, children understand that this means that their rights are connected to their own respect for the rights of others.



Cape Horn Elementary School

WHAT IS THE AIM OF A CLASSROOM CHARTER?

Creating a charter is a way of making children's rights real and meaningful to students, based on where they are now in their own lives. The process of developing the class charter can serve to unite the class. It develops a sense of ownership of the classroom and of the learning process. Once developed, the charter becomes a point of reference for the class. And once signed by both teacher and students, it signifies a shared activity and acts as the 'social glue' which binds everyone together.



Chartwell Elementary School

IN WHAT WAY IS A CLASSROOM CHARTER DIFFERENT FROM CLASSROOM RULES?

The class charter is not a direct behaviour management tool. Rules are something that are often externally imposed, whereas charters are democratically negotiated using a mutually agreed upon values framework. The development of a charter should begin a process of replacing rules.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH THE LINKING OF RIGHTS WITH RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS?

The main point to remember is that children's rights are unconditional; they are not dependent upon a responsibility and cannot be earned, used as a reward or taken away. Children's rights are also universal, so both adults and children should be encouraged to respect rights, so that each individual child can enjoy their rights and respect the rights of others.

However, this does not mean that a child's rights are dependent on them respecting the rights of others. Children do not bear the responsibility of protecting and fulfilling children's rights, adults do. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children have rights and that adults, such as teachers and government, bear the duty to protect and fulfill these rights. Rights do not come with responsibilities for children attached.



Chartwell Elementary School

CAN I HAVE THE WORD “RESPONSIBILITY” AS A HEADING ON THE CHARTER?

Historically, guidance and practice recommended that schools established a negotiated charter that focused on children's rights and their responsibility to behave in a manner that respected their rights and the rights of others. Over time, we have come to see a risk by linking rights with responsibilities too closely. We have seen this lead to a fundamental misunderstanding that the fulfillment of rights is somehow dependent on the fulfillment of responsibilities.

We recommend that instead you use “rights respecting actions, attitudes or behaviours” and “respect for rights”, rather than **only** coupling the work right with responsibility. Constant repetition may distort the balance and have the unintended consequence that access to rights is dependent on “responsible” or “good” behaviour. Rights are inalienable; they cannot be taken away. Of course we want children to grow up to be “responsible citizens” who behave in a way that respects the rights of others; and a school ethos of mutual respect certainly supports this.

TIPS FOR CREATING YOUR CLASSROOM CHARTER

Consider the following ideas when creating a charter with your students.

1. Connect the charter to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ensure that students understand the universal application of children's rights to all children – no exceptions.
2. Involve students as partners in the process of determining the content and wording of the charter, as well as the presentation of it (e.g., what it looks like, where to post it, etc.)
3. Word the charter in a way that is linked to the articles in the Convention.
4. Encourage all students and classroom staff to sign the charter. This signifies a collective responsibility for ensuring the charter is upheld and protected.
5. Discuss any issues that arise, such as what to do when students do not want to sign the charter, how new students will be included in the charter, and when to review the charter throughout the year.
6. Place the chart in an area where it can be viewed by everyone equally.
7. Review the charter with students throughout the year.

MORE IDEAS...

- Have students illustrate each right.
- Provide students with magazines. Have them cut out photos or phrases to make a collage for each right.
- Encourage students to develop a skit or drama that communicates the concepts of rights and respect for rights. They can share the drama and their charter with other classes to educate them about rights and respect for rights.
- Encourage classes to make suggestions for a school charter. Each class can contribute one right and a reciprocal rights respecting action or attitude. A school-wide survey or vote can be used to determine the make-up of the final version of the school charter.

