



Human Rights for IB Social Anthropology utilising the Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Anthropology

The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Anthropology (CEA) is a growing open-access teaching and learning resource. Its goal is to facilitate access to scholarship in Social Anthropology for experts and non-experts worldwide. All entries are written and peer-reviewed by leading academics. This document has been created to provide sign posting to how this resource might be used by those studying IB Social Anthropology.

Purpose of this document

This document provides five learning activities that support learning towards exam paper 2. It also offers some suggestions for applying this topic to an extended essay. The activities can be utilised individually, or as part of a program. Each activity requires 1-2 hours. Two are individual study activities, one is a blended activity of individual and group work, and one is an activity for a small group.

A contents table on page 2 will outline the activities that have been produced.

Preparation

Student would benefit from reading Harri Englund's online encyclopaedia entry which offers a comprehensive overview of Human Rights. These activities will also be best approached by students who have already read (or at least, are a substantial way into) an ethnography that covers human rights. Englund's entry provides a good overview for selecting possibilities.

Example ethnography options

Farmer, P. 2003. *Pathologies of power: health, human rights, and the new war on the poor*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (An ethnography of health and inequality in Haiti – particularly good for Health, illness and healing; The body)

Englund, H. 2006. *Prisoners of freedom: human rights and the African poor*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (An ethnography of human rights activism in Malawi – particularly good for Classifying the world; Development)

International Baccalaureate Curriculum Links

Part 2: Engaging with ethnography.

Human Rights provides possibilities for making connections across several of the key concepts and areas of inquiry.

Relevant areas of inquiry:

Group 1: Classifying the world; Health, illness and healing; The body

Group 2: Belonging

Group 3: Conflict, Development

Link to Key concepts

Primarily Belief and Knowledge, but also Culture, Power, Social Relations, and Society.



Tsing, A.L. 2005. *Friction: an ethnography of global connection*. Princeton: University Press. (An ethnography of political and social conflicts over the Indonesian rainforest – Particularly good for Conflict; Classifying the world)

Page	Activity	Objective	Time
3	Comprehension of the Encyclopaedia Entry	Read the encyclopaedia entry and begin to understand and engage with the key concepts.	The entry will take around 1 hour to read. The exercise will take 45 minutes to complete
4	Conceptual Understanding of Human Rights	Students will be able to connect concepts of Human Rights to ethnography that they have read.	1-2 hours.
5	Human Rights Now	Students will critically assess a current event that deals with human rights, using tools and concepts they have encountered.	1 hour 20 minutes
6	An Anthropological Approach to Human Rights	Students will work in small groups to develop a better understanding of anthropology as a discipline and ethnography as a practice through exploring the key attributes of an anthropological approach to human rights.	1 hour 20 minutes
7-8	Exam and Extended Essay Preparation	Students will be able to apply their learning to general anthropological discussions and broad exam-type questions.	Exam practice: 1 hour. Extended Essay Prompts: 10 mins reading, to prompt future work.



Comprehension of the Encyclopaedia Entry.

Type of Work: Individual

Activity Objective: Reading the encyclopaedia entry and begin to engage and understand key concepts.

Time Allocated: The entry will take around 1 hour to read. The exercise will take 45 minutes to complete.

Read [the Encyclopaedia entry on Human Rights by Harri Englund](#) and answer the following questions:

HARRI ENGLUND

Harri Englund is an anthropologist who works on human rights, humanitarianism, liberalism, democracy, and media. He has worked in Finland and South-Central Africa. You can learn about his work on popular radio in Zambia in Episode 1 of the Camthropod podcast:

<https://www.socanth.cam.ac.uk/media/listen-and-view/camthropod#camthropod-episode-1>



1. How does Englund define 'human rights'? 'Cultural relativism'?
2. What is the 'paradox' of human rights? Why is it a paradox?
3. Englund distinguishes between 'absolute universals' and 'situated universals.' Provide one example of each of these, and explain the distinction between them.
4. Choose two references from Englund's encyclopaedia entry that interest you, and briefly note what you can gauge from Englund about the relevance of that work to the anthropology of human rights.
5. Why might human rights help us to understand key anthropological concepts? Choose one of the following and explain (in 2/3 sentences) what relevance human rights may have to that concept. Give at least one specific example from Englund's piece, or from any additional reading you have completed.
 - a) Belief and Knowledge
 - b) Culture
 - c) Power
 - d) Social Relations
 - e) Society



Conceptual Understanding of Human Rights

Type of work: Individual study

Activity Objectives: Students will be able to connect concepts of Human Rights to ethnography that they have read.

Time allocation 1-2 hours.

Using an ethnography you have previously read or reflections from your own experience answer the following questions:

In his [encyclopaedia entry on Human Rights](#), Harri Englund says that “It is from recognising this basic paradox between a universal principle and its practical application that the anthropological study of human rights arises.’

1. Find **one** example in the ethnography that you have read that demonstrates the paradox of human rights.
2. Can enforcing human rights have negative effects? Find **two** examples from the ethnography that you have read that demonstrate how human rights have produced conflict for people anthropologists work with.
3. Can human rights coexist with the fact of social difference? Why might they still be worth protecting?

Additional group discussion or extension question to help connect the concept of Belief and Knowledge to other ethnographic examples.

How do ‘human rights’ compare with other belief systems?

- Consider religious texts, other legal statutes, political doctrines, or choose your own material thing to think about. Use examples from ethnographies you have read if possible, and your own experience otherwise.
- Create a list of similarities and differences. This could be done in small groups and then fed back so the class can look at common differences.



Figure 1 Credit <https://www.soas.ac.uk/blogs/study/covid-19-human-rights/>



Human Rights Now

Type of work: Independent research, group discussion.

Activity Objective: Students will critical engage with a contemporary event using the ideas explored above.

This activity uses similar framing as the individual study topic above, enabling students to consolidate their conceptual thinking through applying the same ideas to different material, and in a group.

Time Allocation: Research, 1 hour. Discussion 20 mins.

Part 1: Current Events

Ask students to find a news article published in the last five years that deals with human rights in relation to a contemporary issue of interest to them.

Part 2: Present

Ask each student to present the news article to a small group for discussion, focusing on the following points:

1. What is the conflict?
2. What human right is being claimed?
3. What anthropological concepts or debates from Englund's article helped you think through this case?

Alternative distancing measure

Students can engage with the question in a written format or with an online vote and commentary on the initial question followed by collective contribution of other possible ways to depict this relationship.

Part 3: Is this the only way?

In smaller groups students can then engage with the following critical question:

What would a 'cultural relativist' say about this case? A human rights activist? An anthropologist?



An Anthropological Approach to Human Rights.

Type of work: Small group work

Activity Objective: Students will work in small groups to develop a better understanding of anthropology as a discipline and ethnography as a practice through exploring the key attributes of an anthropological approach to human rights.

Time Allocation: 1 hour 20 mins

Group work (45 mins)

Work together in groups of 2-4. Each group should be assigned one of the quotes below. These are all taken from Englund's encyclopaedia entry on Human Rights.

In groups, prepare the following:

1. An explanation of what Englund meant with the phrase.
2. An ethnographic example (or, example from your own life or the media, if ethnographic reading not yet complete) that illustrates the point.
3. What might the phrase tell us about the key principles of an *ethnographic and/or anthropological* approach to studying human rights?

Feedback to class (35 mins)

Share group findings with the whole class.

Quotes from Harri Englund's CEA entry on Human Rights

What problems can arise from 'emphasising civil and political liberties rather than social and economic rights'?

Of Paul Farmer and Victoria Sanford, Englund writes 'simply by practising anthropology, they were practising activists.' What does Englund mean? Does he see this as a problem?

'If the human rights concept is forever evolving, as the AAA's statement suggested, then what lies outside of it now may well have something to contribute to its development in the future.'

What does Englund mean by 'intimate human rights'?

Alternative distancing measure

Smaller groups can then meet online to discuss and create one page per group for digital sharing. At a later date, small groups can meet online to discuss one other group's findings. Teachers can assess the original page per group, plus one page of comments from the work-exchange.



Essay and Exam preparation

Type of work: Individual Study

Activity Objective: Students will be able to apply their learning to general anthropological discussions and broad exam-type questions.

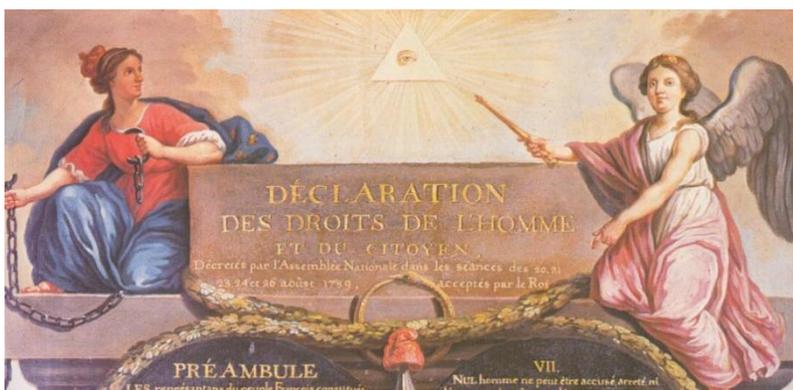
Time Allocation: 1 hour

Write an essay in response to one of the following questions. Use ethnographic evidence of contemporary, real world examples, in the answer.

1. What can the anthropology of human rights teach us about the relationship between knowledge and power?
2. Are human rights compatible with cultural difference?
3. Does the anthropology of human rights champion or question cultural relativism?
4. How does social context impact social values?
5. Can social values be used as tools for power?

TIPS: These questions are broad and general and can be quite intimidating. But you do not need to come up with the final, complete, and correct answer to these questions. You need to use them as ways to think about the specific things that you have read about in ethnography. As a starting point, come up with two ethnographic examples that demonstrate something relevant to the question, and then compare them with one another.

TOP TIP: For an excellent answer, can you think about how anthropologists *ought to* think about the key concepts (eg belief and knowledge, culture, power, society, social relations) in order to best understand human lives? What is good or not so good about the approach of the anthropologist's you have read?





Extended essay or ethnographic research topics

Some students may wish to pursue Human Rights as a topic for their extended essay or ethnographic research. Some possible titles/prompts are below. [Englund's encyclopaedia entry](#) can be used to help you to select appropriate reading and organise your approach.

1. What is the relationship between human rights and colonisation?
2. Human rights are necessary ideal values that are messy in practice.
3. Human rights cannot be understood without considering the social context in which they are implemented.

Or, to come up with your own topic of enquiry you may like to consider:

What did you find surprising about the ethnographies you read?

Is it important that we understand human rights well, and why?

What does anthropology add to our understanding of human rights?