

We Are ALL Born FREE

Judith Escreet, Art Director at Frances Lincoln, writes:

All people are born free and equal are the opening words of Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations on 10 December 1948. 60 years later, to celebrate that anniversary, Frances Lincoln is publishing a children's book called *We Are All Born Free*.

The idea for the book was suggested by one of my designers, Vera Muller, and we all felt it was a perfect subject for Frances Lincoln, with our strong multicultural list of both picture books and fiction and the recently launched Frances Lincoln Diverse Voices Children's Book Award. We had been talking to Amnesty International about working on projects with them, and this seemed the right one to approach them with. We planned to ask artists from around the world to illustrate each of the Thirty Articles of the Declaration, put it all together in a book, and then to hold an auction of the artwork with the proceeds to go to Amnesty International.

Amnesty was keen on the idea and suggested we use their plain language version of the Declaration that they had produced as a poster for children. They also provided a list of artists who supported them and so with that and the addition of many of Frances Lincoln's artists from around the world, we had a wish list of people to approach. We aimed to publish a truly international book and when we took the project to the Bologna Book Fair several European publishers expressed interest and wanted to include artists from their own lists. So we had more than enough contributors, but knew that some of them might well not feel able to contribute due to work pressures.

The first step was a telephone call to each artist asking if they would be interested in the idea. If they agreed this was followed up by a letter from me with the allocated article typeset on a double-page spread and also the complete Declaration so that they could put their article into context of the whole. Articles One and Two were close in interpretation as were articles Twenty Nine and Thirty, so we decided to link those together and ask artists to illustrate the first two and the last two. In total we needed 28 illustrators and someone to illustrate the cover.



Above: Illustrations from *We Are All Born Free* by, (from top to bottom), Chris Riddell, Satoshi Kitamura and Axel Scheffler.

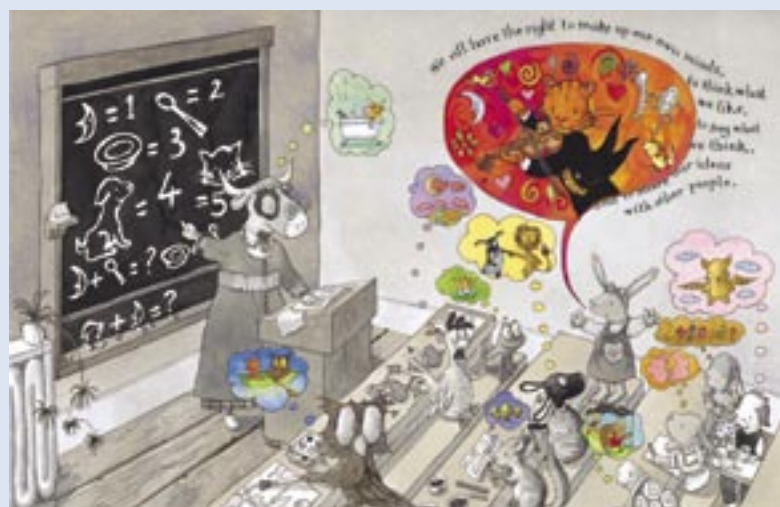
But how to allocate the articles? If we allowed each artist to choose their own, we might end up with six versions of one article, so we decided we should allocate articles, unless any artist felt very strongly about a certain article. Some were easy to visualise, others far trickier. For instance, who should tackle Article Five on torture? A delicate subject especially in a children's book. We hoped that Jane Ray would treat it in a subtle yet child friendly way without avoiding the issue. Her solution of a doll is possibly more hard hitting than if she had depicted a human in a torture situation but perfect for discussion with children. Niki Daly, a South African illustrator, was our choice for Article Three, "We all have the right to life and to live in freedom and safety" and his illustration of Freedom Park complete with statue of Nelson Mandela and children of all colours and abilities is heartwarming. Australian resident Frane Lessac's poignant picture of a boat full of refugees staring out at the reader with the words, "We all have the right to belong to a country" is so apt, especially knowing the history of Australia's refusal to allow Vietnamese boat people to land there.

We set a deadline for artwork and hoped that some of it would arrive by that date!! We had decided to print a promotional blad – 16 pages and the cover – which could be used by our sales team to sell in the UK, US and Europe. This would also leave more time for the other artwork to arrive. Since the artists were not being paid for their work but doing it as a goodwill gesture we could hardly push them to get it finished. Along the way a few artists phoned to say they had to drop out as pressure of work prevented them contributing. We had no idea what each artist would illustrate until the work arrived. Some sent in high resolution scans and some sent in artwork on paper. All the interpretations of the texts are wonderful and completely different, and the enthusiasm that each artist showed for the project was inspiring.

The working title at the start was The Human Rights Book but we needed to find a title that was interesting and had child appeal. Amnesty was closely involved in that decision and finally *We Are All Born Free* was agreed. How the cover looked was vital but who to illustrate it a tricky decision. I had already approached Peter Sis to see if he would contribute, but he had declined due to work pressures. Then Amnesty discovered he had a close friend working in their US office, and so through him we were able to persuade Peter to do the cover. This piece was the one exception in that we asked Peter to do a rough sketch before the final artwork was agreed, and we discussed the content with both our sales team and Amnesty.

Then Amnesty spent considerable time finding the right person to write the introduction. We are lucky to have two introductions for this book – John Boyne and David Tennant have both written very personal and pertinent pieces.

Once the blad was printed, our sales team got to work with enormous enthusiasm and to date have sold 30 co-editions which were printed with our UK edition, including both Israeli and Arabic editions. The one exception is the US edition. The US publishers



Above: Illustrations from *We Are All Born Free* by, (from top to bottom), Jane Ray, Niki Daly, Debi Gliori and Frane Lessac

were all very complimentary about the book but had a variety of concerns: – some publishers were worried that the book might not be child friendly enough as the articles are quite difficult to grasp; some simply felt they did not have enough time to sell the book in properly; some were worried that there were not enough illustrators who are well known in the US; (I did approach lots of US illustrators but most of them declined to take part due to pressure of work, and several simply did not respond at all) and some publishers felt that the US Bill of Rights is better known over there and that the Declaration of Human Rights would be a hard sell in the States. So we are publishing our edition in the US through our own distributors Publishers Group West. They ordered 10,000 copies and to date have orders for 6500 copies. The total print run is 130,000.

Artists have also been generous about donating their time to do publicity events including: Debi Gliori, Axel Scheffler and Jessica Souhami at the Edinburgh Book Festival, Jane Ray at the Halesworth Festival and Korky Paul at Blackwells Oxford. Events are also being arranged at the Imperial War Museum (weekend 6/7 December), The British Library and 7 Stories. Amnesty has produced reproductions of the artwork, which will be exhibited at numerous venues including, the Halesworth Festival, Peters Bookselling Services, various venues in Ireland and a number of Blackwells shops. There will also be an auction of art work.

Amnesty has been working tirelessly promoting the book and there is a short film called *Everybody* (funded by The Co-Op Bank) about the Declaration of Human Rights narrated by Julian Rhind-Tutt to be shown on the same bill as *High School Musical Three* at cinemas across the country. Details of the book and a selection of the artwork are on Amnesty’s website www.amnesty.org.uk

Many of our co-edition publishers are equally enthusiastic about the book and are promoting it already. The Brazilian publisher, Edicoes SM, created a tunnel at the Sao Paulo Book Fair in which they put posters of some of the images.



Above: Brazilian school students enjoy the image tunnel created by Edicoes SM at the Sao Paulo Book Fair.

If we can get people talking about the Declaration of Human Rights and how 60 years on from its inception there is still an awful lot to do in the world to make it a safe and peaceful place for everyone, then we will have achieved something. It has been a privilege working on the book with so many hugely talented artists.

As John Boyne says in his foreword, *this might be the most important book that you ever own*. So go out and buy a copy now!

www.franceslincoln.com/UDHR for more information



Above: Illustrations from *We Are All Born Free* by, (from top to bottom), Alan Lee, Gusti and Korky Paul



Above: Illustrations from *We Are All Born Free* by, (left), Jessica Souhami, and (right) Fernando Vilela

A final word from Enid Stephenson:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures sounds a really terrible idea doesn't it? Until you see the book *We Are All Born Free*. In this fine, and important publication, the rights are put into language everyone can understand and illustrated by some of the finest illustrators in the world.

Children can readily comprehend them, and adults will find the reinforcement of these rights moving and a useful reminder. Adults may pause to reflect how many times in the last 60 years, since the Declaration on 10 December 1948, these Rights have been broken. And broken not just by "outlaw" states but by democratic western countries.

One of the illustrators, Jane Ray, visited a primary school in Suffolk and talked to a class of rising nine-year-olds. I think both Jane and I were privately concerned about how much the children would understand, and indeed how they would react to her chosen subject of "symbolism".



Jane Ray at Saxmundham Primary School

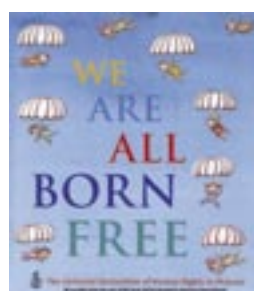
She talked about the book, she showed the first design she did for Article Five – "Nobody has any right to hurt us or to torture us" – why she rejected it and why she finally settled on the broken figure of a doll. The children were absorbed, asked frequent questions and then showed that they did absolutely understand the use of symbols. One by one they came up to the board and drew a simple picture, saying first what it showed and then everyone talked about what it meant – what it symbolised. I suppose that the western world is so governed by symbols (think of television weather forecasts,) that – to the young – there is nothing complicated about them.

Amnesty worker Dan Jones led a series of two-hour workshops in four Suffolk schools, which produced some striking banners. These will have been displayed in an art exhibition during the Halesworth Arts Festival and can be seen again at the Imperial War Museum (first weekend in December) and at the Human Rights Centre in London. Again I was impressed by the intelligence and understanding of the children and the quality of their work.



Halesworth Middle School Banners

All royalties from the sale of *We Are All Born Free* will be donated to Amnesty International and an auction of the illustrations will be held. At the time of writing this has not been finalised but as soon as we know the details we will put them on the Carousel blog www.carouselguide.co.uk, so do keep checking the news part of the website. As one teacher said to me "I will be giving everyone this book for Christmas" – why not follow her example?



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