**Democracy & the Freedom of Speech**

**Debate in New Zealand**

**Week 3: Lessons 1 to 3**

**Why We Do Not Have Freedom of Speech in New Zealand**

**(& that’s a good thing!)**



“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny.”

–Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Success Criteria:** By the end of the week students will have a firm understanding of what it means to practice freedom of speech in New Zealand, and they will be able to recount examples where people cross the line and ‘free speech’ becomes harassment or hate speech and is deemed to be illegal and morally wrong.

**Task 1:** Write down the lesson heading and today’s date.

**Class Discussion:** Do we have freedom of speech in New Zealand? America?

**Hint:** Can you walk into a theater and yell ‘Fire!’ Can you threaten to kill someone or use ethnic slurs or use words like the ‘N’ word to refer to people?

In 2018, the former leader of the Opposition in New Zealand, Don Brash, who some Kiwis feel is anti-Maori, was invited to a debate at Auckland University. Watch what happened:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdsstP-xSyc> (1:20 sec.)

**Reading:** We will read the following statement as a class:

New Zealand, like other Western countries, has some freedom of speech – but only to a certain point. There are certain limits to speech. You just cannot go around saying whatever you think. If you don’t believe me – walk up to the principal or a police officer and start shouting obscenities or threatening to harm them and you would find yourself arrested – and in the case of the principal – suspended and possibly expelled. The reality is – we cannot just go around saying anything we like. It would be chaos if we could. Society must have rules and order.

You cannot yell ‘Fire!’ in a crowded theatre or target people because of their ‘race,’ sexual preference, weight, ethnic group or other features. Such actions would qualify as harassment and some cases, a hate crime. For instance, it is inappropriate to single people out because of where they were born, ethnic background, skin color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, to name a few examples. To physically or verbally attack someone solely because they identified as Jewish or Pacifika or European, would be considered harassment and a crime.

It is important to remember that race is a myth. It is an imaginary concept. There is no such thing as a race. All human beings belong to a single species called Homo Sapiens. In this sense, there is but one race, the human race. The DNA (our genetic code) of every human being on the planet is over 99% identical. Unfortunately, while race may be a myth, it is a social reality. That is to say, if people believe that something is real, it is real to them, even though there is no scientific evidence to support it. Instead of the term ‘race,’ we should use ‘ethnic group’ – people who share a common heritage or cultural background.

**Class Discussion**: Should people have the right to express their views publicly without being shouted down so they are unable to speak?

This issue was recently in the news in New Zealand when a person labeled as an anti-trans activist tried to speak but was shouted down and stuck by objects, forcing her speeches to be canceled.

The issue of freedom of speech – even in a democratic country, is a tricky one. For instance, during the 1950s in the United States, some libraries banned the book ‘Rabbit’s Wedding.’ They saw it as encouraging black and white people having relationships and getting married.

**Task 2:** We will watch the video as a class:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkIADVhvnoM> (6:01 sec.)

**Answer the following question in your Red Book:**

What do you think would happen if someone tried to ban this same book today in America or New Zealand? Explain your answer.

**Lessons 2 and 3:**

**The Great Freedom of Speech Debate at Auckland University**

In April 2017, a History professor at Auckland University (Paul Moon) expressed his concerns about freedom of speech in New Zealand. He said that many people and groups with unpopular views are not being allowed to speak on University campuses. He was specifically referring to the forced closure, by Auckland University, of a European student club (celebrating European heritage) and threats made to its members. Many students felt that having such a group on campus, appeared to promote white supremacy, and said they felt nervous and intimidated about it.

**Task:**

**Read the two articles:**

**Reading A:** Maude, Simon (2017). “’We're not Racist’ claims new European Student Association.” March 6, accessed at:

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/90073114/were-not-racist-claims-new-european-student-association>

**Reading B:** Loren, Anna (2017). “Controversial European students group folds after ‘constant threats to safety.’”

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/90007049/controversial-european-students-group-folds-after-constant-threats-to-safety>

Write two paragraphs.

**Paragraph #1:** Explain why the European student club was not welcome on the campus of Auckland University. For instance, what actions had they taken that made people worried that they might be promoting white supremacy? How did this make some students feel?

**Possible starter topic sentence:**

In 2017, the formation of a European student club to celebrate European heritage resulted in much concern over fears that it was supporting racism. …..

**Paragraph #2:** A nearly identical group (with the same name) applied to become a club at AUT (Auckland University of Technology) and were allowed to exist – and seem to have been more accepted. What actions did the AUT club take to make students feel more at ease with them, and to allay fears that they are racist.

**Possible starter topic sentence:**

When a separate group was formed at Auckland University of Technology and also claimed to be supporting European heritage, the University allowed them to do so based on actions taken by the group.

…..

**Paragraph #3:** Where do you stand on this issue? Write a forceful summary of your opinion on this debate.

**Possible starter topic sentence:**

The issue of being able to exercise freedom of speech at New Zealand universities is important and I side with the actions taken by (AUT or Auckland University – pick one)/

**References:**

Anonymous (2017). “High-profile Kiwis: Free speech under threat in NZ Universities.” *New Zealand Herald*, April 4.

Loren, Anna (2017). “Controversial European students group folds after ‘constant threats to safety.’” March 3, accessed at: http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/90007049/controversial -european-students-group-folds-after-constant-threats-to-safety.

Maude, Simon (2017). ‘We’re not Racist’ claims new European Student Association.” March 6, accessed at: http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/90073114/were-not-racist-claims-new-european-student-association.