



## Child-led learning resource

# ABOUT

This activity helps you to think about freedom of speech, and what considerations are important when deciding what to say, when.

You will be able to explore interesting questions like:

- Should people be allowed to say whatever they want?
- What's more important, freedom to say what you want or safety from harmful words?
- Is censorship necessary during a pandemic?

You can give this a go on your own, but if there's someone at home who can join you, why not work together? You could also connect with someone by telephone or video.

We'll practise some critical-thinking skills which are important for understanding and discussing the news.



**Ready? Let's go!**

# INTRODUCTION

As countries battle the coronavirus, governments have brought in emergency measures that limit what their citizens can do.

You might have felt the impact of this, for example if you have been told to stay at home or if you have queued outside a shop. However, these measures do not always limit physical movement. In Hungary, the government announced an emergency measure so that someone who presents “facts” that are seen as untrue or distorted can be sent to prison.

While this might help to stop fake news being spread about the virus, many people worry that this law has the power to limit freedom of speech.

In April, 13 European Union countries issued a joint statement which said that emergency measures “should not restrict the freedom of expression or the freedom of the press”.

An unprecedented global crisis has brought debates around freedom of speech into the spotlight. These activities challenge you to think about what people should be allowed to say, and who should make the rules.



# “YOU SHOULD BE FREE TO SAY WHATEVER YOU WANT”

## How much do you agree with this statement?

Give your answer as a percentage, where “100%” is completely agree and “0%” is completely disagree. Can you give three reasons to support your opinion?

Read each of the “what if” scenarios and consider the questions. As you go, decide whether they change the percentage you gave to the first question.

### 1. WHAT IF...

#### The thing being said is nasty?

**EXAMPLE:** The designer Stefano Gabbana, of the fashion brand Dolce & Gabbana, left a message under a picture of Selena Gomez on Instagram calling her “really ugly”.

#### QUESTIONS:

- Does it matter that this was on social media, not face to face?
- Who might be particularly upset by this?

### 2. WHAT IF...

#### The thing being said suggests people should hurt others?

**EXAMPLE:** In 2017 a man wrote about a woman involved in a Brexit debate on Facebook. He said, “£5,000 for the first person to ‘accidentally’ run over this bloody troublesome first generation immigrant.”

#### QUESTIONS:

- Was he being serious. Does it matter?
- Who might be upset by this?
- How is it different to example one?

### 3. WHAT IF...

#### The thing being said isn’t true?

**EXAMPLE:** An Australian woman said she had cured her terminal brain cancer by following a particular diet. She then confessed that the cancer was a lie.

#### QUESTIONS:

- Is this more or less acceptable than the previous example?
- Why might this be dangerous to others?
- Who might be particularly upset by this?

### 4. WHAT IF...

#### The thing being said encourages others to do something positive?

**EXAMPLE:** The #metoo campaign encouraged women to come forward with their experiences of harassment.

#### QUESTIONS:

- What if an allegation against someone is false?
- Who might be particularly affected by this?

So, should people be free to say whatever they want?

# CENSORSHIP

## Do you know what censorship is?

Have you heard the word before?

Perhaps on television or in history lessons.

ANSWER

*Censorship is when you stop, or don't allow, something to be heard, seen or read. It's often imposed by a government.*

Can you think of any examples of censorship?

What would it feel like to have your words or speech censored?

**Complete this sentence:**

"My favourite food is... because..."

For example:

*"My favourite food is cheese because it melts and goes very gooey and I love that you can have it on pizza!"*

Write your answer down. If you're working with someone else, swap your ideas and reasons.



# CENSORSHIP

# ARUGJEPS

These letters are now banned.



**You must now cross these letters out of your answer.**

Read your answer aloud, without these letters.  
Does it make sense?

Try to re-write your answer so that it doesn't include these letters. Your answer should make sense and not change its meaning.

Were you able to communicate what you wanted?



# CENSORSHIP

Now, you can now have the letters back. However, everything on this poster is no longer allowed.



- Would you have to rethink your favourite food?
- How do you feel about this?
- How would it feel if an incredibly important message was censored?  
For example, a message about a war or a pandemic?



# QUICKFIRE QUESTIONS

Read the questions below. For each one, set a timer and try to answer for a full 30 seconds.

Afterwards, choose a winning question - the one that made you think the hardest!



1. **Does every society have some kind of censorship?**
2. **Who makes the decisions about what you can and can't say? (E.g. teacher, family, judge, nobody, the public.)**
3. **What's worse: banning words or banning ideas? Why?**
4. **Is censorship necessary during a pandemic?**





# HARMFUL LANGUAGE

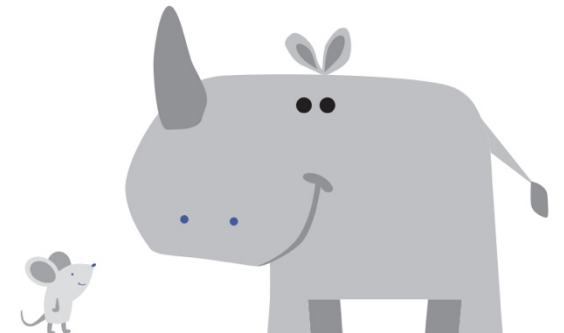
What is the difference between **psychological** and **physical** harm?

ANSWER

*Psychological harm affects someone's mental or emotional state. Physical harm affects someone's body.*

**You'll read four situations involving the same animals.**  
After each situation, answer these questions:

- Were any of the animals in danger?
- If so, was it physical or psychological harm they were at risk of?
- How would you feel in that situation?



# HARMFUL LANGUAGE

## SITUATION ONE

Miniature Mouse and Rambunctious Rhino find themselves together by the side of a river. They are alone.

Rhino runs over to Mouse, stomping his feet loudly. "Get away from my river or I'll stomp on you!" says the Rhino.

Mouse looks worried.

## SITUATION TWO

Miniature Mouse and Rambunctious Rhino bump into each other again.

This time, they are in the long grass where Mouse lives.

Mouse shuffles over and squeaks up to Rhino, "You're so wrinkly and ugly. All my mice friends agree. You don't belong here!"

## SITUATION THREE

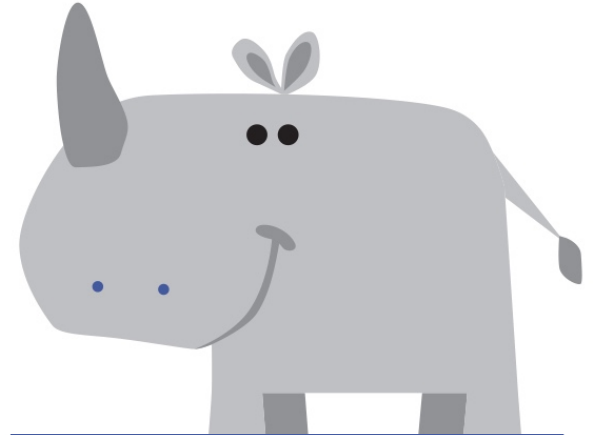
Miniature Mouse and Rambunctious Rhino are meeting each other in the long grass once more. Thousands of other mice emerge, shuffling about quickly and whispering to each other. Mouse shuffles over to Rhino and squeaks up once more, "You're so wrinkly and ugly. All my mice friends agree. You don't belong here!" The whispering mice are looking on, scowling and nodding their heads.

## SITUATION FOUR

Miniature Mouse and Rambunctious Rhino bump into each other the next day by an enormous old tree.

"Sorry about yesterday," Mouse whispers. "Me too," mutters Rhino before saying, "You know, we grey animals should really stick together. It's the Gargantuan Giraffes we should have a problem with."

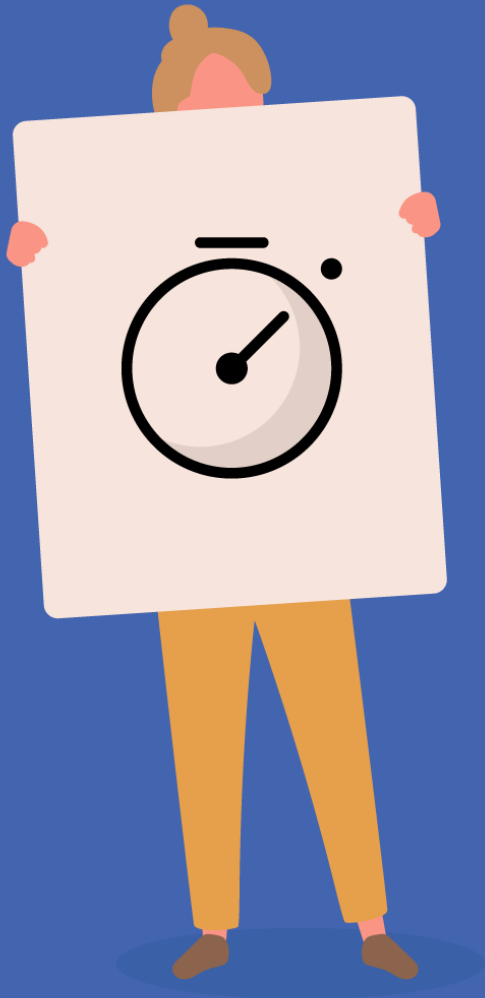
"Quite right," replies Mouse.



# QUICKFIRE QUESTIONS

Read the questions below. For each one, set a timer and try to answer for a full 30 seconds.

Afterwards, choose a winning question - the one that made you think the hardest!



1. **Who was powerful and who was vulnerable in each situation and why?**
2. **If these situations were happening to humans, would you intervene in any of them?**
3. **What's more dangerous: the risk of physical or psychological harm?**
4. **Sometimes two different rights can be in conflict with each other. What's more important, freedom to say what you want or safety from harmful words?**



# INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVES

## Reflection

- Is censorship a slippery slope? (You start by censoring small things and end up with much bigger restrictions.)
- How does someone's power affect how their words are viewed by the public?
- Go back to the percentage you gave in response to this statement: **You should be free to say whatever you want.** Has your percentage changed over the course of these activities? If so, why?



# SUPER-REFLECTION

- Should people have freedom of speech during a pandemic? Think about different groups of people such as the government, the public, the media.
- Who should make sure that the rules around freedom of speech are followed?
- Is it ever okay for people in the public eye to lie?

## NOW...



### **Do some research**

Find out about freedom of speech in different countries



### **Have a discussion**

Talk to someone else about the issues covered in these activities



### **Become the teacher!**

See if you can go through these activities again, as the teacher, with somebody else in your household