Activity Guide: Needs, Rights and Wants

For young people with the confidence and maturity to explore more challenging themes, concepts and ideas.

Suggested Timing	45 - 60 minutes
Materials	• Want and Needs Handout #2 • United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Handout • Board or chart paper and markers
Educator Note	This activity asks students to think beyond individual needs and consider what systems, rules, services and decision-making processes are needed to protect rights in a society. Use this activity before one or more Country Packs to help students apply a rights-based lens to real-world examples.

Need	Right	Want
A need is a condition required for survival, dignity and full development. Needs help explain why rights exist and why governments and adults have obligations to support children. *Examples: adequate nutrition, housing, health services, education, protection, belonging, mental well-being and opportunities to participate.*	Rights are legal and moral entitlements that apply to every person under 18. Children also have responsibilities to respect the rights of others, but meeting responsibilities is not a condition for having rights. *Examples: freedom of expression, privacy, education, legal identity, protection from exploitation, and participation in decisions that affect them.*	A want is something that may improve comfort or enjoyment, but they are different from rights and needs because they are not required for dignity or development. *Examples: luxury items, preferred brands, travel for fun, upgraded technology, or non-essential personal items.*

1. **Introduce rights, needs and wants.** Explain that children's rights are legal and moral entitlements that belong to every person under 18. These rights are not earned or given as rewards; they exist because all children are human beings with dignity. Needs are conditions required for survival, development and well-being, while wants may improve comfort or enjoyment but are not essential.

2. **Brainstorm children's rights.** Ask students to generate a list of rights they believe all children should have. Encourage them to think about survival, protection, education, health, identity, participation, safety, privacy and freedom of expression.

3. **Set up the founding of a new country scenario.** Explain that students have been asked to help found a new country. Their task is to decide what children and young people would need in order to live safely, grow, learn, participate and thrive in this new society. Each pair receives a *Want and Needs Handout #2* with cards including items they may include as they build the country's foundation.

4. **Pause for initial impressions.** After pairs have reviewed the handout, bring the class together for a brief discussion. Ask:

    - What stood out right away?
    - Were any items easy or difficult to categorize?
    - Are there items missing that children and young people would need in a fair, safe and healthy society?

5. **Add four new items.** Tell each pair they may add four additional items of their choice. Students should write or draw these items on the blank cards in the handout, giving them 24 cards in total. Encourage them to think carefully about what would be essential for a fair, healthy and rights-respecting society.
6. **First decision round: reduce to 15 items.** Explain that the country's founding committee has limited resources and cannot include everything at once. Each pair must choose the 15 items they believe are most important and set aside the nine items they would remove.
7. **Second decision round: reduce to 10 items.** Explain that resources have become even more limited, and each pair must now narrow their choices to the 10 items they believe are most essential for children and young people in the new country.
8. **Negotiate in groups.** Ask each pair to join another pair and compare their final 10 cards. Each group must discuss their choices and agree on one shared set of 10 items.
9. **Provide the CRC and connect the activity to children's rights.** Give each student or group a copy of the United Nations CRC. Ask students to compare their final 10 items with the rights listed in the CRC. Which rights are reflected in their choices? Which rights may be missing? Explain that children's rights help protect the conditions all children need to live with dignity, safety and opportunity.
10. **Design rights-protecting systems for the new country.** Ask students to imagine they are helping write the governing playbook for this new country. What rules, systems, services or decision-making processes would need to be put in place to make sure children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled? Examples could include schools, health care, child protection services, accessible spaces, anti-discrimination laws, youth councils, complaint mechanisms, safe housing or ways for children to share their views on decisions that affect them.
11. **Extend the discussion to equity and responsibility.** Ask students to consider whether all children in their community have their needs and rights met equally, whether all children globally have their needs and rights met equally, who has responsibility for protecting children's rights, and what role young people, schools, communities and governments can play.
12. **Close with a connection to National Child Day.** Explain that National Child Day is a time to recognize children's rights and reflect on how those rights are being upheld in Canada and around the world. Ask students to name one right they think more people in Canada should know about.