

Grades 4-6

Introducing the First Amendment

This activity will take two class periods, though it can be compressed to one if it's used by an outside resource expert (suggestion: the resource person can focus on points 1-4). It would be a natural for a lawyer or judge interested in the First Amendment, as well as for a representative of the media.

Objectives

1. Students will inductively discover the First Amendment in action through newspaper reading.
2. Students will get an overview of the Bill of Rights.

Procedure

Using a classroom set of newspaper...

1. Hand out the national and local sections of the daily paper.
2. Ask students to use a colored pen or marker and cross out any articles in these two sections of the paper that contain criticism of government, government leaders or government policies and/or any that contain proposed changes of official people or positions.
3. Discuss articles and any questions or "borderline" articles that students marked.
4. Discuss with students:
 - How interesting and/or informative would the newspaper be if all of the marked articles were missing?
 - Have you ever known of anyone personally damaged—emotionally, professionally or financially—by something printed in the newspaper? Did this change your opinion of "freedom of the press?"
 - Is freedom of the press absolute? You may wish to discuss questions of libel, free press/fair trial, publication of national secrets.
 - Is the press—and the television/radio news—less "free" in some communities in the United States than others?
5. Use a cartoon or another news article to illustrate that there are other significant constitutional amendments beyond the familiar First Amendment.
6. Distribute to students a copy of the Bill of Rights.
7. Review with them and/or have them find in the dictionary any unfamiliar words, i.e., "abridging," "redress," "grievances."
8. Allow students to choose one of the first ten amendments and find articles in the newspaper that relate to "their" amendment. Allow them to go to other issues of the newspaper or news magazines to find relevant articles, if necessary.
9. Finally, the teacher may assign students to make a bulletin board displaying the news articles found labeled with the appropriate amendment.

The strategy is adapted from an article in Update on Law-Related Education, Vol. 11, No. 1, published by the American Bar Association. It was taken from the Utah Law-Related Education Elementary Lesson Plan Book, and is reprinted with the permission of the Utah Law-Related Education Program.