

The First Amendment in the News

Purpose:

This lesson directs students' attention to the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment. Through a worksheet and a news scavenger hunt, the lesson provides practice identifying the rights in everyday situations. Students develop simulated news broadcasts or power points focused on First Amendment freedoms. At the conclusion of the lesson, students will be able to list the freedoms protected by the First Amendment and will identify First Amendment rights in everyday situations.

Procedure:

1. Draw students' attention to the words of the First Amendment and tell the class that today they will begin focusing on the First Amendment to the Constitution. Review with students the five rights protected by the First Amendment: freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom to petition the government to correct unjust actions.
2. Introduce students to an acronym that will help them remember the five rights protected by the First Amendment. The acronym is GRASP – Grievances/petition, Religion, Assembly, Speech, Press.
3. Ask students to develop simple definitions of each right. The following are samples:
 - Freedom of petition (grievances)—the right to ask the government to correct an unjust action or change its policy.
 - Freedom of religion—the right to believe (or not believe) whatever you wish and the right to act on your beliefs without government interference; separation of religion from government.
 - Freedom of assembly—the right to meet peaceably in groups and to freely associate.
 - Freedom of speech—the right to express your views and to hear others' views.
 - Freedom of the press—the right to write and publish information and opinions, including criticism of public officials; the right to read, hear, or watch such information.
4. Ask students which of the rights belong to individuals and which belong to groups. Point out that while particular groups (religious, political, press, etc.) benefit from First Amendment freedoms, the rights belong to each individual in our society. For example, every individual has the right to write and publish information, as well as having access to information published by others in

books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television and everything on the Internet including blogs and sharing sites such as My Space and Facebook.

5. If you want to provide students with additional practice identifying examples of First Amendment rights, distribute the handout titled, *First Amendment Rights in Everyday Life*. (Answer key: 1. press; 2. speech; 3. assembly; 4. speech; 5. religion; 6. religion; 7. grievances/petition; 8. press; 9. press)

6. Divide the class into small groups and give each group either a supply of newspapers or have them look at an online newspaper. Each group should try to find at least one example of each First Amendment right in the newspaper. If a group is using newspapers, ask students to clip the articles and paste them on sheets of paper. If a group is using an online newspaper, have them copy and paste the article into a word processing document.

7. Conduct a brief class discussion of the articles the groups found. Assign each group to prepare a five-minute news broadcast focusing on First Amendment rights. The broadcasts should cover actual events or issues that represent the First Amendment freedoms. Encourage students to be creative, staging "person on the street" interviews and other simulated news features. You may want to allow several days to a week for preparation. Be sure to allow class time for presentation of the broadcasts, which could be videotaped or presented "live." You might schedule one presentation each day for a week in order to keep interest high. Students can use the handout *First Amendment News Broadcast Rating Form* to evaluate each other's presentation and practice identifying rights. If feasible, a local reporter, editor or producer could be present to comment on the students' presentations.

8. As an alternative to the broadcasts, students could prepare a PowerPoint presentation to share with the class.

Enrichment/Extension

1. Have each student keep a "First Amendment Diary" where they track instances involving First Amendment rights in their own lives. Some groups may wish to provide regular broadcasts on "The First Amendment News."

2. Students might ask a sampling of adults in your community if they can list the rights protected by the First Amendment. If students find that most adults cannot identify the rights, they might write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper describing the problem and presenting a modern language version of the First Amendment developed by the class.

First Amendment Rights in Everyday Life

Each scenario below deals with a First Amendment right in everyday life. Read each one. In the blank before each story, place the letter of the First Amendment right the scenario depicts.

First Amendment Rights

grievances/petition

religion

assembly

speech

press

- _____1. Yolanda Highsmith operated a newspaper for the African-American community in a large city. In her newspaper, she often criticized the mayor and city council.
- _____2. Rick Jackson stood in front of an oil company's office. He held a sign that said "Don't buy oil from polluters."
- _____3. Twenty-two high school students met in the park across from school to protest the firing of the basketball coach.
- _____4. Chase and Kristen wore yellow armbands to school to show support for political prisoners in Sudan.
- _____5. Mr. and Mrs. Stuart taught their three children at home because their church does not approve of public education.
- _____6. Jack and Maria refused to bow their heads during the prayer that began a session of the state legislature.
- _____7. Li Chen went from door to door, asking people to sign a letter to the president protesting his policies on the homeless.
- _____8. Kendall and Roxie printed and handed out flyers describing unfair hiring by a local business.
- _____9. Rachel and LaTisha used the Internet at their public library to do research for a class assignment on the way the federal government works.

First Amendment News Broadcast Rating Form

Fill in the issues related to each First Amendment right covered in each news broadcast. Then give the broadcast a rating.

Issues	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
Religion						
Speech						
Press						
Assembly						
Grievances/ Petition						
Rating 1=poor 2=fair 3=average 4=very good 5=excellent						