

Unit: Introduction to the First Amendment (Middle School)

This unit introduces students to the five freedoms of the First Amendment: religion, speech, press, assembly and petition. It includes pre- and post-visit activities designed to bracket the Introduction to the First Amendment EDClass, plus a class-specific gallery guide. Through these experiences, students will see how the First Amendment plays a role in their daily lives and begin to understand the importance of these freedoms.

Note: You can also find additional activities, worksheets and handouts related to Introduction to the First Amendment by searching EDTools on NewseumED.

OBJECTIVE: Students understand the five freedoms of the First Amendment and how they play a role in their lives.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Middle school

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What freedoms does the First Amendment guarantee?
- How do we use the five freedoms in our daily lives?

KEY TOPICS AND SKILLS

- The First Amendment
- The role of the five freedoms in our daily lives
- Balancing rights and responsibilities

UNIT CONTENTS

1. Before Your Visit
 - **My Five Freedoms:** Students will be able to define the five freedoms of the First Amendment and provide examples of how they exercise these freedoms in their own lives.
2. During Your Visit
 - **NewseumED Class – Introduction to the First Amendment:** This 15-minute lesson introduces students to the five freedoms of the First Amendment. How do they use their freedoms, and how might their lives be different without them?
 - **You Can't Say That in School Gallery Guide:** This guide takes students through the Newseum's First Amendment Gallery (Level 4) to see how their freedoms can be exercised daily and in school.
3. After Your Visit
 - **Would You Fight for All Five?:** Students explore the interplay among the five First Amendment freedoms as they play an elimination game to determine the most important freedom.

Before Your Visit: My Five Freedoms

Students will be able to define the five freedoms of the First Amendment and provide examples of how they exercise these freedoms in their own lives.

GRADE LEVEL: Elementary and middle school

TIME: 60 minutes

MATERIALS: First Amendment Basics handout and My Five Freedoms worksheet (download)

PREPARE

1. Print copies of the handout and worksheet, one per student or per small group.
2. Review the First Amendment Basics handout.

DO

1. Distribute the First Amendment Basics handout and give students a few moments to read it.
2. As a group, talk through the First Amendment, asking students to define each freedom in their own words.
3. Distribute the worksheet and have students brainstorm ways in which they use/have used and could use each of the five freedoms. (Students may work individually then pair/share or work in groups.)

DISCUSS

Ask students to reflect on the importance of the First Amendment to them, and how it affects their lives.

Possible prompts include:

- How do you use the five freedoms already? How do you see yourself using them in the future?
- How would your life be different if these rights were not protected?
- Which freedom is the most exciting? The most useful to you? Used most often?
- Which of these freedoms do you think causes the most controversy/debate and why?
- If you had to eliminate one of these freedoms, which would you pick, and why?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Divide students into five groups, and assign each group one freedom. Have students work individually or as a group to create digital or physical posters that show how their assigned freedom may be exercised. Poster may include words, drawings, collaged images from magazines, newspaper clippings, video links, etc. Display and discuss finished posters.

During Your Visit: Gallery Guide

This guide takes students through the Newseum's First Amendment Gallery (Level 4) to see how their freedoms can be exercised daily and in school.

GRADE LEVEL: Middle and high school

TIME: 30 minutes

MATERIALS: You Can't Say That in School Gallery Guide ([download](#))

After Your Visit: Would You Fight for All Five?

Students explore the interplay among the five First Amendment freedoms as they play an elimination game to determine the most important freedom.

AUDIENCE: Middle school

TIME: 30 minutes

MATERIALS: none

DO

1. Tell your students you're going to talk about the First Amendment. Ask if they can name and define each of the five freedoms, and give examples of ways they exercise each freedom. Write the five freedoms on the board and make sure your students understand what each one means:
 - Religion – You can believe what you want, belong to any religion or no religion.
 - Speech – You can voice your opinions using words, symbols or actions.
 - Press – The government cannot censor information in newspapers, online news sources, TV news broadcasts, etc.
 - Assembly – You can gather in a group.
 - Petition – You can criticize the government, and you can complain about policies that affect you negatively and ask for change.
2. Then, ask students if they think any one of these freedoms could exist alone, without the support of the other four. Note that all five freedoms are linked and often intertwine with each other. Possible prompts:
 - Would free speech be a powerful right if we did not also have a free press?
 - How would freedom to petition be different if we didn't also have freedom of assembly?
3. Now tell students they will decide which freedom is most important by voting four freedoms "off the island." In four rounds, students raise their hands to vote for a freedom to eliminate. After each round, select students to explain their reasoning.

DISCUSS

Now that only one freedom remains, ask students if they agree that it's the most important right. Then, discuss how life would be different if we didn't have the other rights. Possible prompts include:

- Would people exercising this right have to do anything differently if they didn't have the other four?
- Has the remaining right lost its meaning because of the elimination of the other four rights?
- If you only had freedom of _____, would historic events such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech on the National Mall have been possible?
- How different might our country be if we hadn't made a list of rights to protect? Do they think we would still have those rights if they weren't listed in the Constitution?
- In keeping with the fears of those who opposed a Bill of Rights, are there any rights you think our Founding Fathers forgot to put in the Bill of Rights or the First Amendment?
- What would you add if you had been writing this document 225 years ago? Is there anything you would add today that they didn't foresee?