

Unit: Introduction to the First Amendment (High 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 NewseumED class, 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: High 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
 - **What's a Violation?:** Students will apply their knowledge of the First Amendment to specific scenarios to determine when those freedoms are protected and when they are not.

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: What's a Violation?

Students apply their knowledge of the First Amendment to specific scenarios to determine when those freedoms are protected and when they are not.

AUDIENCE: Elementary and middle school

TIME: 30-60 minutes

MATERIALS: First Amendment Scenarios handout and worksheet (download), answer key (included at the end of this packet)

PREPARATION

1. Copy the scenarios and the worksheet, one for each student or small group.
2. Review the answer key to assist with student discussion.

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 these freedoms are protected in all situations or could there be exceptions? What about at home? In schools? In newspapers?
3. Now tell the students they will review different situations related to the First Amendment freedoms and decide which scenarios show a violation of First Amendment freedoms and which do not.
4. Divide class into four groups. Distribute the scenarios to each student and one worksheet to each group. Ask the students to read the scenarios for each First Amendment freedom and vote as a group on each one. Assign one student to compile the student answers on the worksheet.
5. Once the groups have completed the worksheets have them present their answers to the full class.

DISCUSS

Were there differences of opinion among the groups? Prompt students to defend their reasoning. Do they see patterns of what is protected by the First Amendment and what isn't? Use the answer key to support additional discussion.

Answer Key: First Amendment Scenarios

Religion

1. No. The First Amendment does not apply to parents.
2. No. A private school can require religious activities.
3. Yes. According to the Supreme Court's ruling in *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe* (2000), public school-sponsored, student-led prayer violates the First Amendment.
4. Yes. The First amendment forbids the government from establishing an official religion.

Speech

1. No. Private employers do not have to abide by the First amendment.
2. Yes. According to the ruling in *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969), officials cannot punish this kind of symbolic speech unless it would substantially disrupt school.
3. No. Schools can set dress codes and make rules about students' appearance.
4. Yes. The Supreme Court rules in *West Virginia v. Barnette* (1943) that the First Amendment protects your right not to be forced to say something.

Press

1. No. Private employers do not have to abide by the First amendment.
2. Probably not. According to the ruling in *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* (1988), public high school officials can censor school-sponsored newspapers if they have reasons related to education. Some states have passed laws giving the student press greater protection.
3. No. The First Amendment does not apply to parents.
4. Yes. The First amendment protects the right of the professional press to write stories critical of government.

Assembly and Petition

1. No. Generally speaking, private clubs do not have to abide by the First Amendment.
2. No. The First Amendment does not give you the right to assemble on private property. However, some states allow freedom of assembly in shopping malls even though the U.S. Constitution does not.
3. Yes. According to the ruling in *National Socialist Party of America v. Village of Skokie* (1977), the national Socialist (Nazi) Party could not be prohibited from marching peacefully because of the content of their message.
4. No. The First Amendment does not give you the right to leave school without permission in order to assemble.