

# Balancing Freedoms: Historical Case Study and Debate

Students use primary sources from a historical event to inform a debate over balancing freedoms in American history and draw connections to 9/11 and the present.

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will understand multiple perspectives and arguments that shaped a historical debate about First Amendment freedoms and make connections between past controversies and recent events.

**GRADE LEVEL:** Middle school, high school, college and university

**TIME:** 60-90 minutes

**MATERIALS:** Copies of the selected historical case study and positions, one per student (download); copies of the Balancing Freedoms: Organizing Evidence and Present Your Position worksheets, one of each per group (download); access to [NewseumED.org](http://NewseumED.org) to view primary sources

## PREPARE

Review your chosen case study and its corresponding background and primary sources.

## DO

1. Review the First Amendment's five freedoms: religion, speech, press, assembly and petition. Explain that the case study they will be looking at will examine a past debate about how far these freedoms should go.
2. Pass out and read the case study scenario. Check for comprehension and ask students to identify which First Amendment freedom(s) is/are at issue in this case.
3. Break your class into small groups and assign each group one of the people/perspectives. Hand out copies of the Balancing Freedoms: Organizing Evidence worksheet. Give groups approximately 30 minutes to look at the primary sources online and answer the worksheet questions. (Note: Students may wish to organize their sources and evidence using a spreadsheet, such as Google Sheets.)
4. Pass out the Balancing Freedoms: Present Your Position worksheets and allow each group 10 minutes to fill it out.

## DISCUSS

Have each group present its position and give arguments in support of this position. Keep the gallery of case study sources on [NewseumED.org](http://NewseumED.org) open so students can refer to them as they explain their arguments. Possible prompts include:

- Which person/people has/have the strongest position? The weakest position? Why?
- Which person/people won in this case? Do you agree with this outcome? Do you think it would have the same outcome if similar events took place today? Why or why not?
- How does this case study relate back to 9/11 and the debates and tensions that arose in this country after the 2001 terror attacks?
- What current issues does this historical controversy remind you of? (To draw further connections, you may wish to use the contemporary case study that corresponds with your chosen historical case study.)

## **EXTENSION ACTIVITY 1**

Share the “What’s your freedom type?” NewseumED quiz with your students. In small groups, students should agree on an answer for each question. Then, as a class, compare results. Discuss: How easy/difficult was it to come to a consensus on an answer for each question? How is that process similar to/different from arguing a position you’ve been assigned?

## **EXTENSION ACTIVITY 2**

Write a position paper or record a video of a statement that provides further evidence in support of a position on this issue. Students can use the provided gallery of primary sources as a starting point, but may also incorporate additional research to strengthen their arguments. A NewseumED Pinterest board of related resources for each case study (accessible via a link in the Materials section of the case study page) provides a starting point for expanded research.