

Introduction to First Amendment Lessons

The lessons included on this web site are for teachers in grades 5-12 and are intended to help them develop students' awareness of the rights of identified in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. The lessons are organized according to the First Amendment right(s) they are designed to cover. There is also a section included on strategies that can be utilized in the lessons.

The lessons are not designed to be used in their entirety; nor do they need to be used in a particular order for students to benefit. One factor that should be considered in determining which activities to use is level of difficulty. The lessons are suitable for students' varying ability levels and ages. However, difficulty should not rule out use of a lesson that addresses a relevant topic or employed a teaching strategy that you think would work well with your students. We urge teachers to consider adapting materials to meet the needs of their classes.

Of course, content is also an important factor to consider in choosing lessons. Some teachers may want to coordinate lessons with topics in their civics, U.S. history or other social studies classes. Other teachers may want to put together a mini-unit on the First Amendment or on students' rights. Still other may want to select several lessons that reinforce students' language skills for use in language arts classes.

All the lessons use a participatory approach that encourages students to discuss, role-play, conduct surveys, create projects and in other ways become engaged in their learning. Although questions for discussion are suggested, teachers are encouraged to develop their own questions to better key the discussion to their students' abilities. Teachers should also feel free to modify or adapt the lesson in whatever way seems appropriate for their communities.

Several of the lessons employ a case study approach. The case study approach involves students with hypothetical or real situations in which there is a conflict or dilemma. Students then analyze the facts of the case, reach and support a decision and weigh the consequences of that decision. A case study requires students to ask questions; define elements important to a situation; analyze, synthesize, compare and contrast those elements; and make judgments. The students are, in short, practicing all levels of thinking.

The steps in a case study activity are generally as follows;

- **Step 1: Review of the Facts.** This includes distinguishing between facts that are relevant and important to the case and those that are irrelevant or unimportant. It also should include identifying what important facts are missing.

- **Step 2: Investigation of Issues/Arguments.** This step involves identifying the issue or issues central to the conflict, developing arguments in support of various positions and evaluating those arguments.
- **Step 3: Reaching a Decision.** In this step, students synthesize the various arguments in order to make and support a decision. If the case being analyzed was a real one, they should compare their decision with the one reached by the court or another decision-making body.

The case study approach requires the teacher to serve in several capacities – diagnostician, discussion leader and “climate-maker.” The latter may be most difficult for teachers. In order to develop a favorable classroom atmosphere in which to use the case study approach, the teacher must refrain from dominating class discussion by repeating, commenting on or asking questions of the same respondent following each remark. Rather, questions and comments should be redirected to other members of the group or class. Also, biases of the instructor regarding the cases should be contained. When they are expressed, they should clearly be open to class review and analysis.

Case study lessons can easily be adapted to fit local needs of the curriculum by substituting related cases for those provided in the lesson. The news media and Internet are sources of current cases related to First Amendment issues.