

Bill of Rights

Summary

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce and examine the Bill of Rights.

Objectives: By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

Define the Bill of Rights

Be able to identify and explain each amendment

Understand why these amendments were included in the Constitution.

(These students are in 8th grade, the purpose of this lesson is NOT to spend days and weeks studying in depth the concepts within the Bill of Rights, nor is it to investigate the hundreds of Supreme Court cases that have arisen in controversy over the interpretation of these amendments. An extension of this lesson can easily be developed if there is further interest in investigating, for example the 1st amendment.)

Enduring Understanding: Students will understand the structure and function of the United States government established by the Constitution.

Essential Questions:

What are the rights, liberties, and responsibilities of citizens?

What is the Bill of Rights?

Why was the Bill of Rights added to the Constitution?

Time Frame

1 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Large Groups

Materials

BINGO CARD (or materials to create one)

Bingo markers (pinto beans work well)

Bill of Rights scenarios (see attachment in instructional procedures)

Classroom set of Constitutions (most textbooks will have the complete Constitution at the back of the book)

Background for Teachers

Though ratified in 1787, the United States Constitution came under heavy criticism by anti-federalists who were upset that certain guarantees of individual rights were not included. Others in the Constitutional Convention only approved of the Constitution on the understanding that a guarantee of such rights would be added. The Bill of Rights, written by James Madison were the first additions, or amendments made to the Constitution. They guarantee certain individual rights like freedom of speech, religion, the right to petition the government for redress of grievances, the right to a jury, the right to bear arms, and other rights. The Bill of Rights was ratified in 1791.

Student Prior Knowledge

This lesson should be taught in conjunction with the Constitution as a whole. Students should have a base understanding of what the Constitution is, how it came about, and what the main elements of the Constitution are. Students should also be aware of the happenings of the Constitutional Convention and the ratification process, during which a Bill of Rights was promised. Students should understand the background of the framers and their experience with British law in the pre-Revolution

American colonies that inspired these 1st 10 amendments.

Instructional Procedures

Step 1: Ask students to look up in their Constitutions where the framers included a list of guarantees for the people of this country. Does the Constitution mention the people anywhere in the 1st article? 2nd? 3rd? (Briefly review the content of the seven articles and lead the class to the conclusion that there is no list of PEOPLE'S rights in the core of the Constitution.) Lead a discussion encouraging students to think about the importance of such a list included in this the "Supreme Law of the Land." How can we as people be sure we have the rights we desire if those rights are not written down somewhere, and what better place than the Supreme Law of the Land?

Step 2: Write "Bill of Rights" on the board and ask the class for definitions. Explain to the class that the Bill of Rights is the 1st 10 amendments made to the Constitution. Make sure students understand that an amendment is a change to the Constitution. (You may want to review Article 5 of the Constitution in which the process of constitutional amendments is discussed. It may also be interesting to note that in the 200-plus years since the writing of this sacred document, only 27 "changes" or amendments have been made.) Also, explain that these first 10 are our guarantees or certain rights as people. Some of these rights protect those accused of a crime; others rights protect the minority: each of the amendments included in the Bill of Rights help to ensure a more democratic society and lessens the possibility of an usurpation of power by those in authority.

Step 3: At this point, tell the students that we are going to look at each of these 10 amendments in terms of examples that might apply to us. Have students read the examples (attached) and have students look in their Constitution to find the appropriate Bill of Rights that applies to each example. (These examples were created for my students at my school; please feel free to adjust or to make up your own.) As students read and identify the proper Bill of Rights, list them on the board and encourage students to write them down. (It is easier for students to remember if keywords are used rather than entire definitions.) Also, discuss the historical reasons for each amendment. (For example, the 3rd amendment was passed as a direct result of the Quartering Act so hated by the colonists.)

Step 4: Once all the examples have been read and each amendment has been discussed, review their knowledge with the "Bill of Rights BINGO". You may create a BINGO card for each student, or have them create their own in class (see attachment for example). Students should create a table (5 rows, 5 columns) with an amendment (1-10) in each space, leaving the center space FREE. You will also need to provide students "markers" (beans or popcorn kernels work well) and be prepared with the lettered numbers (B-1, N-8) to call out. When everyone has a BINGO card, begin the "game." However, instead of simply calling the letter and number, call the letter and the guarantee or the amendment. For example, B-Freedom or speech. N- No cruel or unusual punishment. It's up to you if you want to let students use their books or notes. You may want to play a couple games, allowing books/notes at first and then having students put these things away. When a student gets "BINGO", he/she doesn't not win unless he/she can go through each square and recite what the amendment is and explain what it means. You may even want to require the student to provide an example with each amendment named to truly assess his/her understanding.

Extensions

This lesson is easy to extend. Because there are so many court cases dealing with the 1st 10 Amendments, this topic lends itself to research quite well. With a bit of preparation, you can provide students with a number of Supreme Court cases and have them analyze the cases. Also, because these amendments are so open to different interpretation, debate surrounding each of these amendments naturally occurs. Simulation of a debate surrounding a particular case involving, for example, the freedom of speech/expression, death penalty, etc, would draw students into these

amendments on a deeper level. If desired students can spend days researching a topic to prepare for the debate. Also, a mock trial covering an actual case helps students see how these amendments affect everyday real life.

Assessment Plan

1. Quiz (see attachment).

Bibliography

"We the People"

, Center for Civic Education

Authors

[Heidi Alder](#)

[Russell Fullmer](#)

[Scott Stucki](#)