



# CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER

## The Bill of Rights

### LESSON PLAN AND ACTIVITY

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## **The Bill of Rights** Lesson Plan and Activity

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**Grade Level:** 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

**Subject(s):**

- Social Studies: U.S. Government, State Government, Local Government; and
- Language Arts: Reading, Writing.

**Duration:** 1 class session

**Description:** This lesson explores both the words and practical implications of the Bill of Rights.

**Goals:**

Illinois Learning Standards

**A. Social Science:** 14A, 14B, 14D; and

**B. English/Language Arts:** 1B, 1C; 3A, 3C; 4A, 4B.

**Objectives:**

1. Explore and understand the basic definitions of each of the first ten Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.
2. Understand the importance of these basic rights.
3. Discover how the Bill of Rights affects our daily lives.

**Materials:**

1. Handout: “Which Rights Do You Choose?”
2. Handout: “Summary of the Bill of Rights”
3. News articles regarding such topics as the USA PATRIOT Act; detention of immigrants; recent legal cases regarding the use of search warrants; and free speech rights when using social networking websites to be located by instructor through Internet news search.

**Instruction and Activity:**

1. Have students review the handout “Which Rights Do You Choose?”
  - A. Which rights should everyone have?
  - B. Which rights should only some people have? Which people should those be?
  - C. Are there any rights which nobody should have?

Optional: Have each student take the list of rights to ten people, such as other students, friends, and/or family members, and ask the same questions, thus discovering what the “average American” thinks.

2. Come back together as a class and reveal the many rights that are guaranteed to every American through the Bill of Rights, the first ten Amendments to the United States Constitution.
3. Ask: Why did our founding fathers think that these rights were important?
4. Ask: During a time of war, or in today's climate, should all of these rights still be guaranteed?
5. Ask students **how** some or all of these rights could be removed. Answer: A constitutional amendment is necessary, although some rights have been curtailed through legislation or executive orders, e.g. the USA Patriot Act, executive orders by the President.
6. Look at news articles about the USA PATRIOT Act; detention of immigrants; recent legal cases regarding the use of search warrants; free speech rights when using social networking websites; etc. Ask students to evaluate which rights have been limited through court decisions or the use of the USA PATRIOT Act, other legislation, and executive orders.

Possible answers:

- A. Freedom of association
- B. Freedom from unreasonable search and seizures without a warrant
- C. Right to a lawyer in a criminal trial
- D. Right to a speedy trial in a criminal trial
- E. Freedom of speech

Ask students why the above rights are necessary. How would their lives be impacted without them?

Answer: The freedoms listed in the Bill of Rights serve several purposes. Not only do they protect the individual from other individuals doing bad things, but they protect individuals and groups from abuses of power in government. Can you think of any times in history where there has been an abuse of power in government?

National Examples: Watergate Scandal

State Example: Illinois Governor George Ryan bribes for license scandal (regarding commercial driver licenses when he was Illinois Secretary of State).

## WHICH RIGHTS DO YOU CHOOSE?

Read through the rights listed below.

Which rights do you think everyone should have?

Which rights do you think only some people should have, and which people should those be?

Which rights should nobody have?

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1. The right to choose and practice your own religion or to choose not to practice any religion at all without interference by the government.
2. The right to express your opinion on any topic.
3. The right to learn about what is happening in the world without interference by the government (e.g. read the newspaper, watch television, search the internet).
4. The right (of reporters) to report news without interference by the government.
5. The right to gather with your friends or with other people with whom you have common interests.
6. The right to ask the government to fix something that is wrong.
7. The right to own a gun.
8. The right to live in your house without the government placing a soldier to live there too.
9. The right to privacy.
10. The right to have a jury of people like you determine if you should be charged with a crime.
11. The right not to be charged and tried for the same crime more than once.
12. The right not to say things to the police that will get you in trouble.
13. The right to have the government go through certain procedures (e.g. issuing a proper warrant) before it can jail you, search you, or take your property, or jail you.
14. The right to know with what crimes you are being charged.
15. The right to a speedy and public criminal trial.
16. The right to an impartial jury in a criminal trial.
17. The right to know the identity of all witnesses against you if you are a defendant.
18. The right to know what witnesses in a criminal trial are saying against you if you are a defendant.
19. The right to watch witnesses give testimony against you at a criminal trial.
20. The right to an attorney in a criminal trial.
21. The right to a jury in a civil trial.
22. The right not to be tortured at the hands of the government or police.
23. The right not to be severely punished for “smaller” or “less serious” crimes.

**SUMMARY OF THE BILL OF RIGHTS**  
**(First Ten Amendments to the U.S. Constitution)**

First Amendment

- Freedom of religion
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of the press
- Right of people to gather together
- Right to petition the government

Second Amendment

- Right to own a gun

Third Amendment

- Right not to have soldiers live in your house

Fourth Amendment

- Right to be free from unreasonable police search of your person or your belongings without cause

Fifth Amendment

- Right not to incriminate yourself
- Right not to be charged twice for the same offense
- Right to due process

Sixth Amendment

- Right to a speedy criminal trial
- Right to a jury in a criminal trial
- Right to representation by a lawyer in a criminal trial

Seventh Amendment

- Right to a jury in a civil trial

Eighth Amendment

- Freedom from cruel and unusual punishment

Ninth Amendment

- Federal rights enumerated in the Constitution do not necessarily limit other rights retained by the people

Tenth Amendment

- Powers not specifically enumerated in the Constitution for the Federal government are given to the states.