

Teacher Guide and Answer Key for the First Amendment Worksheet

This activity is adapted from The First Amendment activity that is already a Justice Teaching lesson plan. This lesson is for students who have developmental disabilities and are in grades 3-5. This lesson concentrates on the freedom of speech allowed by the First Amendment, not the freedom of religion.

Steps of the Assignment

1. Ask students if they have heard of the First Amendment. What is the First Amendment about? Get answers. Write correct answers on the board. You should inform them that today you are focusing on the free speech section of the First Amendment. Explain that the First Amendment is a right for people living in the United States. You should inform them that everyone has the right to free speech, even people who are not citizens of the United States or are in the United States illegally.

2. Write the First Amendment on the blackboard in a separate space. It is:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

Explain the section of the First Amendment that concerns free speech in clearer, simpler language.

3. Ask students whether the First Amendment covers free speech in:

- a. newspapers
- b. web sites
- c. radio
- d. television (what are the limits? Can you swear on television? No. Language is censored to abide by the rules of the Federal Communications Commission, a government agency).
- e. a public protest, such as a protest about a war
- f. statements by a company (the answer is that companies are also afforded opportunities to engage in free speech)
- g. reckless statements, such as falsely yelling fire in a crowded theater (the answer is that this is not strictly protected speech. Such speech constitutes a “clear and present danger” to people because it incites general havoc).



4. Discuss what life would be like if people were not allowed to have free speech. For example, what if the government controlled the press? If government controlled, the media could only report items that had been approved by the government. What if the government did not allow people to talk about the president or certain religious figures? The answer is that you would have to watch what you said, even in your own home.

5. Explain the worksheet to students. Will you get in trouble if you say the sentences out loud in public? Check the box yes or no. Read each sentence to students or have them read them out loud to the class in turn.

6. Have students complete the worksheet. In the case of the sentence about aliens, tell them that no one would believe this sentence so a person who said it would not get in trouble. In the case of the sentence about fire, explain that it is a lie. The person saying it knows there is no fire. Have students do the “crazy sentence” question and read their sentences to the class. Have students do the last question, about what freedom means to them, as a close to the activity. Read some of the responses and discuss them with the class.

