



THE FIRST AMENDMENT

OVERVIEW:

This activity creates an awareness of the five rights contained in the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. Students will learn about a poll of Americans and their knowledge of the First Amendment. The activity will allow students the opportunity to dissect the First Amendment and determine their opinions on which rights they value most and least.

GRADE LEVEL:

Upper elementary grades

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Sticky notes (bright colors)
Copy of First Amendment
Large chart papers to record responses

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS:

Grade 5: Civics and Government
Standard 1 SS.5.C. 1.2
SS.5.C. 1.3
SS.5.C. 1.5

Standard 3 SS.5.C.3.5

PROCEDURES:

1. Ask students if they know what a right is . Let several students answer and add to each other's definitions. Ask students if our rights are written down anywhere. Show students a copy of the US Constitution by holding up a copy. Let students know that the US Constitution was written over two hundred years ago. It tells us about how our government is organized and how it should function. It also lists some of the rights we have in this country. Tell students that lots of surveys have demonstrated how little Americans know about their government and their rights. Ask what kind of problems there could be if Americans did not know what rights they had or how the government is supposed to work. Let students answer and add to each other's statements.

Then, without any preparation, ask students if they can name the five rights in the First Amendment. Do not let them see the First Amendment at this stage. List the ones they know. Let students know that in a survey of Americans conducted by the First Amendment Center, only 2% of Americans could name all five rights in the First Amendment.



2. Distribute copies of the First Amendment and let students know you will dissect it together. Select a student to begin reading the First Amendment out loud. Stop the student after each right and discuss that right and its historical significance. Have students circle each right as it is identified. Discuss the limits on each right and its relevance today. Assist with defining terms and pronouncing words.

Post large chart paper around the room with one right from the First Amendment listed on each individual chart paper.

Provide students with two sticky ‘post-its’ and ask them to write on each of the two, one of the rights in the First Amendment that they value most. Give students a few minutes to work individually.

Ask all students to place their sticky post it notes on the appropriate chart papers labeled for that right. Then ask all students to be seated. This provides a visual of which rights in the First Amendment are most valued and least valued by the group. Reference how many votes each of the rights received.

Put students in groups of five, have students analyze the five rights in the First Amendment. As a group, the students must come to a consensus on the importance of each of the five rights. Ask students to look at the order the rights are listed in the First Amendment. If they were writing the First Amendment today, what order would they place each right? Give 15 minutes to discuss in small groups. Have students place their new order of rights on chart paper.

Bring each group up front one group at a time to share their proposal and discuss the order in which they would place each right today if they were rewriting the First Amendment. Post around the room.

Debrief making comparisons among groups.

Discuss with students what life might be like in this country without some of these rights. For example, what if the government controlled all of the press. The news media could only report stories cleared first by the government. What if the government limited our freedom of speech so that we could not say negative things about our government officials, even in the privacy of our homes?

Examples can vary by grade level.

Provide students with pocket Constitutions if possible. Draw their attention to the Bill of Rights. Briefly discuss with students how we came to have this Constitution. End by asking students who the Constitution protects us from. (The government) Why did our founding fathers think we needed protection from our own government?