



1Voice Lesson Plan: “This is Youth Voice?”

Lesson Objectives:

In each One Voice lesson plan, our goal is to equip you to achieve the following outcomes:

- Help students understand what is and isn't allowed in public schools according to First Amendment law;
- Provide a forum in which a number of possible solutions to a problem exist and can be respectfully debated;
- Reinforce the idea that First Amendment rights are not absolute;
- Allow students to discover the challenges associated with striking the proper balance between individual rights and civic responsibilities;
- Engage students in a thoughtful consideration of how to solve problems and resolve conflicts peacefully.

Founding Principles:

Please take a moment to remind your students of the "First Principles" (described below), which explain in everyday terms what the First Amendment does and does not mean.

Use these principles to provide both a context and a set of conversational ground rules for the students and the discussion that will take place.

Opening Move:

Distribute copies of the op-ed, “This is Youth Voice?” Have the students either read individually or review the piece as a class. Ask students to be on the lookout for key ideas with which they agree or disagree.

Procedure:

Divide the classroom into three rows of chairs, evenly spaced, and ask the students to stand at the front of the room. Explain to them that you'll be playing several rounds of “Philosophical Tug of War.” With each question you ask, students will be asked to sit in or stand next to one of the three rows: Row A (I agree); Row B (I'm not sure); or Row C (I disagree). Let the students know that once everyone has chosen a row, you will ask students to justify their position. The goal is to get other students to agree with their ideas, change their votes and join their row – that's the “tug of war.” Make sure the students heed the ideas contained in the First Principles, so that all conversations are grounded in a respect for differences of opinion.

Next, move on to the questions, which spring from the ideas in the op-ed. Whenever possible, ask the students to refer back to the text to support their ideas.

- Q: The author suggests that our society does not value youth voice. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
- Q: The author writes: “Today, many of us, if we think about the First Amendment at all, are less likely to envision Cesar Chavez, Alice Paul or black armbands, and more likely to imagine computer-generated images of child pornography, divisive culture wars in our public schools, or “Bong Hits 4 Jesus” banners.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement, and why?
- Q: The author’s main point in the article is that no matter how the Supreme Court decides, the First Amendment rights of students will suffer. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement, and why?

When five minutes of the class remain, take a final vote about whether or not the students agree or disagree with the author. Conclude the lesson by asking the group if they can imagine a scenario that would have avoided a lawsuit and resolved the conflict between Joseph Frederick and his principal more effectively. What should both sides have done differently? And what lessons for their own school – and their own lives – is there to gain from this example?

First Principles:

The First Amendment applies to all Americans. Our nation affirms the truth of inalienable rights for all, working for more than 200 years to make the ideals expressed in the First Amendment a reality in the lives of all Americans. These rights were so important to early citizens and their leaders, many states refused to ratify the Constitution of the United States without the promise of amendments that would protect individual rights.

First Principles was originally developed and published by the First Amendment Center. The Center works to preserve and protect First Amendment freedoms through information and education. For more information, visit www.firstamendmentcenter.org.

Here are some key principles to help you and your students interpret the First Amendment’s 45 words and understand how they influence our daily lives.

1. The First Amendment affirms the freedom of the individual.

American government is based upon the concept that all human beings are born with certain rights or freedoms. The First Amendment guards these rights by prohibiting the government from denying citizens their rights. The government does not give us our rights. Its role is to guard the rights that we already have.

We, as individuals, have freedom of conscience. Religious liberty, or freedom of conscience, protects the beliefs of everyone, not just those of recognized faith communities. We are free to worship —or not to worship — as we choose. The government may not tell us what church, synagogue, mosque or temple to attend

or whether, where and how we should pray.

As individuals, our ideas and beliefs are our own. We are free to develop and express our thoughts. Through our free press, we have access to a vast range of information. We may criticize our government if we see fit to do so. Judgments about ideas are for individuals to make, not for government to decree.

The First Amendment guarantees we may associate with people and join groups of our own choosing. We may ask or lobby the government to correct certain wrongs or support our beliefs.

2. Free expression is the foundation — the cornerstone — of democracy.

The First Amendment is based on the premise that people who can freely share information (especially about their government) will be informed and able to make sound choices about what leaders to elect, what forms of government they want, what laws to enact. The freedom to exchange information about the government enables people to seek alternatives to bad government.

3. The First Amendment tells the government to keep its “hands off” our religion, our ideas, our ability to express ourselves.

“Congress shall make no law ...” means that as far as possible the government may not interfere with our fundamental rights. The government may not pass laws that take away our First Amendment freedoms or that force us to express ideas — including religious beliefs — that we do not embrace. But the First Amendment is not absolute.

“No law” does not mean “absolutely no law.” For instance, human sacrifice cannot be permitted in the name of freedom of conscience. The Supreme Court has affirmed that some limits must be placed on our freedoms. The government, for example, may regulate the time, place and manner, but not regulate solely on the basis of the content of our beliefs, ideas, and expressions. We may need to hold a permit before we march in support of a particular cause, but we should not have to worry about the government telling us we have no right to believe in that cause or express that idea.

4. Other people have rights, too.

The First Amendment is based upon the conviction that all human beings have inalienable rights. Our commitment to rights is inseparably linked to our civic responsibility to guard those rights for all others.

When faced with unpopular views or unrefined speech, members of the public may ask, “Why doesn't the government do something about that?” The answer? Neither government nor a majority of the public has the authority to stop an unpopular idea.

Because the First Amendment belongs to everyone — to each individual — it encourages us to respect the right of others to hold their viewpoints and religious beliefs. The First Amendment protects minority viewpoints and helps us to understand that limiting the rights of some people may eventually limit the rights

of all.

5. When rights collide, government must balance them.

Sometimes the government plays a role in balancing our rights. When two rights collide, tension and controversy may result. What happens, for example, when a person's right to a fair trial conflicts with our right to learn if a fair trial is actually taking place through accounts reported in our free press? What happens when an individual's right to personal privacy conflicts with the free flow of information? The government (through the courts) may make decisions that protect both rights to the fullest extent possible.

In addition to knowing where government officials draw the line when regulating expression, it is important to understand who may and may not control what we say or write or perform.

Public school administrators are government officials and, like city officials, have both power and limits regarding regulation of expression. Although students do not give up their First Amendment rights when they come to school, the United States Supreme Court has determined that school officials may restrict students' rights if the administrators determine that exercising those rights would interfere with the school's mission of educating its students. However, as government officials, they may not control or censor expression to the degree that a private organization or family might. The First Amendment does not apply to private school officials.

6. The First Amendment helps us make choices.

In the "marketplace of ideas," we may choose which views to support and which ones to reject. When all ideas are allowed to flourish, we — as individuals — may decide what ideas and concepts to question, embrace or reject. First Amendment advocates say it best: The antidote to distasteful or hateful speech is not censorship, but more speech.