

# The United States Bill of Rights

*How does the Bill of Rights preserve Americans' individual liberties?*

“Government ... should be formed to secure and to enlarge the exercise of the natural rights of its members...”

*James Wilson, 1791*

## Overview

*The Bill of Rights* activity demonstrates how the first ten amendments, by listing freedoms guaranteed to United States citizens such as freedom of speech and due process, state specifically many of the rights protected by the Constitution. Students have the opportunity to examine the importance of these liberties as well as the limits the Bill of Rights places on the power of American government.

## Objectives

In the core lesson, students will:

- identify fundamental liberties the Bill of Rights protects in American society
- prioritize the rights American citizens enjoy
- explain the connections and interdependence among the first ten amendments
- work cooperatively to apply constitutional protections in hypothetical scenarios

## STANDARDS

**CCE (5-8):** II.A.1; IV.B.1; V.B.1,2

**CCE (9-12):** II.A.1; II.C.1; IV.C.1; V.B.1,2

**NCHS (5-12):** Ch. 3, Era III: 3.B; Era X: 2.E

**NCSS:** Strands 2, 5, 6, and 10

## MATERIALS

### Student Handouts

- Individual copies of the United States Bill of Rights (*Appendix B*)
- **Handout A: Which Rights Do I Value Most?**
- **Handout B: Bill of Rights Scenario Cards**
- **Handout C: The Bill of Rights Today**

### Additional Teacher Resources

- Answer Key

## RECOMMENDED TIME

One 45-minute period

# LESSON PLAN



## I. Background/Pre-Assessment/Homework [10 minutes the day before]

- A. Distribute **Handout A: Which Rights Do I Value Most?**
- B. Present the following scenario and directions:

The United States has been invaded by hostile forces and the federal government has been overthrown. The leader of the new government is a dictator and will allow American citizens to retain five of the fundamental liberties guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. Select the five that are most important to you. List them along with a paragraph defending your choices. Complete **Handout A** for homework.



## II. Warm-Up/Anticipatory Activity [15 minutes]

- A. Ask students to share and defend some of their responses for **Handout A: Which Rights Do I Value Most?**
- B. Try to develop a consensus of the one right that nobody in the class would be willing to give up (and/or *if* there is a right that everyone agrees they could live without).
- C. Discuss similarities and differences among the rights they could not live without (if any) and the rights which they deemed expendable (if any). Ask students if they think any of these factors might change their opinions:
  - **Age**—would the rights have a similar ranking if the students were adults?
  - **Place in history**—would the rights have a similar ranking if the students lived during the Founding period?
  - **Place in history**—would the rights have a similar ranking if the students were not living during the War on Terror?
  - **Parents**—would the rights have a similar ranking if the students' parents were attorneys? Ministers? Convicted felons? Members of the military?
- D. Conclude the discussion by reminding students that many of the rights protected in the Bill of Rights are natural human rights that none of them should live without. The Bill of Rights protects us from government infringement on those rights.



## III. Activity [30 minutes]

- A. Divide students into twelve groups.
- B. Give each group one Scenario Card from **Handout B: Bill of Rights Scenario Cards**. Students should consult an individual copy of the Bill of Rights (*Appendix B*) while working with their group members and answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper:
  1. Which right (if any) is being violated in the scenario?
  2. Which amendment (if any) in the Bill of Rights would offer protection against such a violation?

- C. After two or three minutes, have students pass their Scenario Card to the group to their right.
- D. Repeat the procedure until each group has seen every Scenario Card.
- E. When the groups have concluded with their final card, ask one member of each group to stand as the group representative for their analysis of their last card. Group representatives should align themselves in the front of the classroom in Amendment number order to create a living Bill of Rights. (Some Amendments will have more than one representative in the line.)
- F. Have each representative read their group's scenario card and share with the class the responses they generated with their partner(s). (Consult the *Answer Key* for the correct answers.)



#### IV. Homework Options

Distribute **Handout C: The Bill of Rights Today**. Have students research current events that illustrate the individual rights and protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. Students could begin by searching the Bill of Rights Institute Web site, *www.BillofRightsInstitute.org*, and reviewing the “Bill of Rights in the News” links. Other Web sites and periodicals may be used. Students should locate at least four examples and complete the graphic organizer to summarize the stories and draw connections to their lives.

#### Extensions

- Have students research the debate between Federalists and Anti-Federalists over inclusion of a Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution. In small groups, students will assume the position of either a Federalist or an Anti-Federalist to write and produce a modern day television or radio commercial that outlines the merits of their viewpoint and persuades Americans to vote for or against the new Constitution.
- Assign students to research in pairs one of the topics (e.g., Expression, Religion, or Property) from the “Bill of Rights in the News Activity” section of the Bill of Rights Institute Web site <<http://www.BillofRightsInstitute.org/article.php?sid=417>>. Students should present a five-minute summary of major positions on the issue and concludes with the students' opinions.



## SCENARIO CARDS

scenario	1	scenario	scenario	2	scenario
<p>Sara, an eighteen-year-old college student, is arrested for stealing a classmate's term paper and selling it on the Internet. When she appears before the judge, she asks for a lawyer to help defend her. The judge tells her if she is smart enough to be in college, she knows enough to defend herself. Besides, she is not being charged with a felony, so the stakes are not very high.</p>			<p>Neighbors are suing the Joneses because a tree in the Joneses' yard fell on their roof during a hurricane. The neighbors want the Jones family to pay \$850 to have their roof repaired. Mr. Jones requests that a jury be present to hear this case. The judge says it is not necessary since the amount of the repairs is so small. The Jones family lives in Washington, D.C.</p>		
scenario	1	scenario	scenario	2	scenario
scenario	3	scenario	scenario	4	scenario
<p>Carolyn is arrested for shoplifting a candy bar from a neighborhood convenience store. At trial, she is found guilty. The judge decides that the appropriate punishment is to cut off Carolyn's hands so that she will not be able to shoplift again.</p>			<p>Mr. Reynolds, an avid hunter, opens the door of his home one day to find agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms outside. They inform him that certain provisions of a new federal law allow them to confiscate his rifles so that he may not engage in terrorist activities or plot against the United States government. They have no evidence that he is connected to any such activities.</p>		
scenario	3	scenario	scenario	4	scenario

## SCENARIO CARDS

scenario	<b>5</b>	scenario	scenario	<b>6</b>	scenario
<p>Your science teacher asks the class to exchange papers to correct last night's homework. Your friend, Jamie, refuses to do so and is sent to the principal.</p>			<p>Jesse, a fourteen-year old student, decides to protest the war in Iraq. He wears a T-shirt to school with a picture of the White House and the caption "Weapon of Massive Misinformation." His principal pulls Jesse aside and asks him not to wear the shirt again because it is disruptive to the learning environment. Jesse wears it the next week and is suspended from school for three days.</p>		
scenario	<b>5</b>	scenario	scenario	<b>6</b>	scenario
scenario	<b>7</b>	scenario	scenario	<b>8</b>	scenario
<p>Sixteen-year-old Ryan is the captain of the football team. Before the Friday night game, he and his teammates are required to submit to a drug test. Ryan's test shows traces of marijuana. He is not allowed to participate in the game and he is suspended from school.</p>			<p>A known drug dealer is arrested for suspected connections to an inner city murder. The police do not inform him of his rights and immediately begin to interrogate him. They continue until he admits he knows the victim of the crime and was in the neighborhood where the murder took place.</p>		
scenario	<b>7</b>	scenario	scenario	<b>8</b>	scenario

## SCENARIO CARDS

scenario	<b>9</b>	scenario	scenario	<b>10</b>	scenario
<p>Your parents are very religious people, but you are not. Today, your parents are going to a service at their place of worship and they expect you to come along. You refuse. They make you come anyway and they ground you for the following month.</p>			<p>Because of the budget deficit, the United States government is looking for ways to cut costs. They have announced a plan during peacetime to house unmarried soldiers in the homes of American citizens who do not have children.</p>		
scenario	<b>9</b>	scenario	scenario	<b>10</b>	scenario
scenario	<b>11</b>	scenario	scenario	<b>12</b>	scenario
<p>Because Members of Congress are unhappy with students' standardized test scores in many states, they pass a federal law that abolishes local school boards and requires a standardized national curriculum.</p>			<p>You are in the security line at the airport. The transportation safety agent requires you to take off your coat, take off your shoes, and empty your pockets. The agent also completes a pat-down search.</p>		
scenario	<b>11</b>	scenario	scenario	<b>12</b>	scenario

# THE BILL OF RIGHTS TODAY

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**Directions:** Complete the graphic organizer below by locating stories and news articles about issues related to the Bill of Rights today. Begin by searching the Bill of Rights Institute Web site, *www.BillofRightsInstitute.org*. Click on the “Bill of Rights in the News” link. You may use other newspapers and periodicals. Attach article or printouts to this page.

Headline/Topic of Article	Summary of Article	Related Amendment	Ways this Issue Might Touch My Life