

Author: Pam Barker
Topic/Era: Constitution/Bill of Rights
Subject: United States History
Grade Level: Middle School
Length of Lesson: Four, 50-minute class periods

Introduction:

With tyranny still fresh in the minds of Americans, they were cautious about placing too much power in the hands of their new government. By 1780, eight of the thirteen states had adopted formal state constitutions. Many limited the state power of the governor. Most states established a two-house, or bicameral legislature to divide the power even further. State legislators were elected by popular vote. Voting rights were extended only to those who were twenty-one years old, male, and owned a certain amount of property.

In 1777, the Second Continental Congress adopted the Articles of Confederation. This new central government functioned as a firm league of friendship in which each state retained its sovereignty, freedom and independence. This new government had the authority to conduct foreign affairs, maintain armed forces, borrow money, and issue currency. Yet, it could not regulate trade, force soldiers to join the army, or impose taxes. If the Confederation Congress needed to raise money or troops, it had to ask the state legislature, but the states were not required to contribute.

Freedom after the Revolutionary War came at a heavy economic cost. Depression spread throughout the young nation, a period when economic activity slowed and unemployment increased. Southern plantations had been damaged during the war and rice exports dropped sharply. Trade also fell off as the British closed profitable West Indies markets to Americans. Most of Congress's merger revenue went to pay off foreign debts.

Even these meager sums of money raised by the states for the central government had a devastating effect on farmers. Farmers were unable to sell their goods because the economy was so slow and unemployment was high. State officials began seizing farms for unpaid debt. Resentment grew, especially in Massachusetts. To relieve the debtors dilemma, the farmers called for the government to issue paper money and establish new policies. This resulted in a thousand angry farmers marching toward the federal arsenal in Springfield, Massachusetts. Ultimately stopped by the state militia, the march served as an example of the discontent felt throughout the new nation.

It became only too apparent that the American Revolution had created a union of 13 states, but it had not created a united nation. Many began to demand a reform of the Articles of Confederation. In 1787, a Constitutional Convention was called in Philadelphia to address the shortcomings of the Articles of Confederation and try to create a united nation.

Two distinct factions would surface during the Constitutional Convention. Federalists favored a strong central government while anti-federalists favored more state sovereignty. James Madison would lead the charge for the federalists during the summer of debate. In the end, the federalists would win. The Articles of Confederation were completely discarded and the Constitution as we know it today was adopted with strong recommendations. Slavery was recognized and protected under the new constitution. Yet, several states would not ratify the new Constitution without provisions of protections for citizens, known today as the Bill of Rights. The tyranny of King George was still fresh in their minds. This will be our focus of study for the next few days.

Objective(s):

1. Students will enumerate the first ten amendments known as the Bill of Rights.
2. Students will outline the special protections afforded by each amendment.
3. Students will determine the appropriate amendment for fictitious Constitutional court cases.
4. Students will trace the origins of amendments one through four.
5. Students will create a Bill of Rights for teenagers.

Nevada State Content Standards and Benchmarks:

History Standard 6.0: Students understand the people, events, ideas, and conflicts that led to the creation of new nations and distinctive cultures.

Benchmark 6.8.8: Identify the principles of the Bill of Rights.

Civics Standard 5.0: Students know the roles, rights, and responsibilities of United States citizens and the symbols of our country.

Benchmark 5.5.4: Identify the Bill of Rights

Materials List:

- United States History Textbook
- Graphic bubble sheet for amendment
- Worksheet, “Bill of Rights”

In Class Activities:

Day 1

- Suggest to students that the School Board Trustees are considering passing an ordinance that will permit school administrators and school nurses the right to collect random hair and blood samples to check for drug abuse. Watch as students begin to challenge the thought of such an infraction. Ask them why this could not happen. Lead discussion to the Bill of Rights. Suggest that it is very difficult to exercise your rights unless you are familiar with them. Explain to them that this will be our focus for the next few days.
- Read commentary that is outlined at the beginning of lesson plans. Analyze details paragraph by paragraph (monitor student understanding).

- Pass out amendment sheets and graphic bubble sheet. Read each amendment as it appears. Break students into groups of three or four, depending on size of the class so there are ten groups.
- Assign each group one of the first ten amendments.
- Assign students to write their names (first and last) on the sheet and to write the amendment as it appears in the text on their sheet (labeled amendment).
- Assign students to identify the rights protected above their amendment in the small bubbles. Explain this is like a web. Use 1st-Freedom of Religion as guided practice. You can demonstrate filling in the bubble on the board.
- Walk around the room to see if groups need assistance.
- Bring the class back together. Have each group read their amendment and identify which of the ten they are discussing. Instruct other groups to listen attentively and review the amendments and rights as they are being read. Make sure the group addresses all of the protections under the amendment.
- Ask students if they had to number the amendments in order of importance, which amendment would be first? Which amendment would be last?

Day 2

- Review lesson from previous day.
- Pass out Bill of Rights document (or textbook).
- Pass out fictitious court cases (one for each student).
- Read directions and check for understanding.
- Guided practice-whole group-work through first three or four cases to be sure students understand what to do.
- Break into groups and monitor students' understanding.
- After they have finished at least the first side, bring students back to the whole class.
- Have students exchange papers and correct in class.
- Remind students of their ordered choices for the first and most important amendment; last and least important amendment. Ask them, "Seeing how the amendments are used in our courts, do you want to change your mind? Which amendment should be first? last?"

Day 3

- Suggest to students that they are truly gaining a better understanding of the Bill of Rights. Tell them, "We know what rights the amendments protect, but, why did our founding fathers choose these rights? Where did they gain experience to write such an awe inspiring document? We see through the court cases how these amendments protect us. Now we need to understand where these ideas came from."
- Brainstorm with students where the ideas for the amendments came from. Lead discussion to the events that precipitated the Revolutionary War. Why did the colonists go to war in the first place? (Yes, grievances. What are grievances? They are complaints or causes for protest.) Explain that this is what we will trace today.
- Have each student take out a piece of paper. Have students fold it in half lengthwise like a hot dog. Tell them that they will now number their paper 1-4. They will skip three lines between each number. Label column one-Rights; column two-Grievances. Have students turn to the chapter about the Road to Independence

(1763-1776) in the classroom textbook. Ask, "What and where did the British deny freedom of the press and assembly?" Explain that after the Boston Tea Party, the British Parliament passed the Coercive Acts. The act prohibited town meetings (assembly). Freedom of the press is evident through such publications as Common Sense. People need to have an open discourse of ideas to choose the best course of action. Break students into groups and have them look for rights/amendments 2-4. Bring them back to the whole class to share their ideas. A lot of the grievances will center around Boston because Boston was more vocal and violent than some of the other colonies.

- Ask, "Where did the ideas for the Bill of Rights come from?" (Grievances). Suggest to students that tomorrow they will be writing a Bill of Rights for teenagers. Suggest that they think of some grievances that teenagers endure, they will address them in their Bill of Rights.

Day 4

- Review grievance activity from the previous day.
- Ask students to suggest grievances and rights to address and protect teenagers.
Example: Grievance: Teenagers don't like little brothers and sisters in their rooms. They get into things they should not and often break things.
Right: Teenagers have the right to the privacy in their own rooms.
- Instruct students that they must have at least 5 grievances and 5 rights. Suggest that a \$200 a week allowance is not a right, but paying for baby-sitting or chores might be a right.
- Break students into groups and have them begin working. Walk around the room to monitor and assist students. Make sure they put all names on their paper.
- Bring students back to the whole class and have each group report their grievances and rights. How many groups had similar grievances and rights? Were any forgotten?

Evaluation/Assessment:

- Day One-Group - Participation points. Did each group outline on bubble sheet the correct protections under their specific amendment?
- Day Two-Group and individual participation. Did each group work through activity? Did each student finish assignment? Grade accordingly. Good exercise to assess how effective the groups were. Maybe some group changes will be necessary.
- Day Three-Group and individual participation. Did each individual participate and turn in graphic organizer? Part of assessment should be informal. Were groups and individuals engaged?
- Day Four-Group and individual. This is a culmination activity. The three previous days build to student understanding for this activity. Were teenage rights born of grievances? Did their outlined right address the issues adequately?
- Possible fifth day could be spent in the computer lab having students type up their teenage rights and making it look like a real governmental document. Also, students could navigate websites to find additional information on the Constitution.

Resource Materials:

- United States History Textbook

- Amendment bubble sheet
- Worksheet, Bill of Rights (see attached)
- PowerPoint Software
- The Charter of Freedom-Bill of Rights:
www.archives.gov/national_archives_experience/chater/bill_of_rights.html
- Library of Congress-Bill of Rights:
memory.loc.gov/ammem/help/constRedir.html -

Adaptations:

- ELL students and special education students can be paired with a specific student in their groups. These students can work as a pair within the group.
- Accelerated students will write a preamble to their rights of teenagers modeling the preamble introducing the Constitution. If computer lab time is available, accelerated students can present amendments using PowerPoint, including a frame for each amendment.

Name:
Date:
Period:

BILL OF RIGHTS

Directions: Read the following fictitious cases and decide which of the first 10 amendments applies to or would apply. Write the number of the amendment in the blank and explain why it applies.

1. The City Council of Reno passes an ordinance that the sale or possession of guns is illegal. Amendment # _____; Explain:

2. The governor of California warns newspapers and other news reporting agencies that no stories concerning activities in the state capital of Sacramento should be reported or printed. Amendment # _____; Explain:

3. A newspaper reporter reports illegal activities going on in the state capital of Louisiana. The reporter is brought before a judge and refuses to name his source for the story. He is placed in lock-down until he names his source.
Amendment # _____; Explain:

4. A policeman suspects that Jeremy Short is selling illegal drugs out of his house. The officer sneaks into the house and finds drugs. Amendment # _____; Explain:

5. During a trial for a reputed crime boss, a witness for the defense is asked if he has sold illegal drugs in the past. Amendment # _____; Explain:

6. Joseph Smote is arrested for burglary. Joe is unable to pay the cost of an attorney. The judge makes him stand trial anyway. Amendment _____; Explain:



AMENDMENT: _____

