

champions OF FREEDOM



CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT QUESTION

What Founding documents influenced the First Amendment?

OVERVIEW

James Madison said the Constitution was “the work of many heads and many hands.” The same is true of the First Amendment. This lesson will introduce students to the views and contributions of three Founders: Thomas Jefferson, whose writings form the backbone of many Founding documents; George Mason, who was one of only three delegates to the Constitutional Convention who refused to sign the document; and James Madison, who guided the Bill of Rights through Congress. Finally, students will apply the freedoms protected by the First Amendment to their own lives.

[Thomas Jefferson] was ...a “walking Library,” and ...the Genius of Philosophy ever walked hand in hand with him.

–JAMES MADISON

George Mason it was who first gave concrete expression to those inalienable human rights that belong to every American citizen and that are today the bedrock of our democracy....

–PRESIDENT HARRY TRUMAN

MUSEUM CONNECTION

Help your students understand the history of the First Amendment. Take your class to the **Founding Generation** exhibit and analyze the statements of individuals who helped frame the Founding documents at the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum (www.FreedomMuseum.us).

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- understand the rights protected by the First Amendment.
- understand why Mason and Jefferson demanded a bill of rights be added to the Constitution.
- assess the contributions to the First Amendment by Thomas Jefferson, George Mason, and James Madison.
- appreciate the contributions to their country made by Jefferson, Mason, and Madison.

STANDARDS

NCHS: Era 3, Standard 3

CCE: IIA1, IID1, VB1, VB2

NCSS: Strands 2, 5, 6, and 10

STUDENT MATERIALS

Handout A: American Roots of the First Amendment

Handout B: Jefferson, Mason, and Madison on Freedom

Handout C: The First Amendment and My Freedom

FREEDOM CARDS

John Quincy Adams

Charles Carroll

Thomas Jefferson

Joey Johnson

Martin Luther King, Jr.

James Madison

Thomas Paine

Ida B. Wells

See page 107

GRADE LEVEL/TIME

Two 45-minute middle school classes or one 90-minute block

BACKGROUND/HOMEWORK

[10 minutes the day before]

Have students complete **Handout A: American Roots of the First Amendment**.

WARM-UP

[10-15 minutes]

Have students share their responses to **Handout A**. Ask students to read the three documents once more, and this time, underline passages in the first two that refer to rights protected by the First Amendment.

ACTIVITY I

[20-30 minutes]

- Distribute **Handout B: Jefferson, Mason, and Madison on Freedom**.
- Divide the class into trios. Have students read **Handout B** together and discuss each person's contributions and the quotations by or about each. Then have each group member assume the identity of Jefferson, Mason, or Madison and argue among themselves as to whose contribution to the First Amendment was most important.
- Ask three volunteers to come to the front of the class for an "American Idols of the Founding" contest. Have each volunteer make his/her case for being the most important contributor, and have the rest of the class vote and eliminate one person. Then have the remaining two continue to make their cases using more persuasive rhetoric, and have the class vote again.

ACTIVITY II

[20-30 minutes]

- Have students complete **Handout C: The First Amendment and My Freedom** individually. Students should think about exercising their rights at this time in their lives.
- Have students share their responses, and conduct a large group discussion on the ways the First Amendment protects freedom. Some suggested discussion questions:
 - How, if at all, does freedom of "speech" protect activities like burning the flag?
 - Do people have the right to say mean or hurtful things about others? Does it matter if they are true—or false?
 - What happens when a religious belief conflicts with a law?

AMERICAN ROOTS OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Directions: Read the document excerpts. Then write one paragraph comparing and contrasting the three documents. What do they have in common? How are they different?

George Mason:
Excerpts from the Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776)

Section 6. That elections of members to serve as representatives of the people, in assembly ought to be free...

Section 12. That the freedom of the press is one of the great bulwarks of liberty, and can never be restrained but by despotic governments.

Section 16. That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity toward each other.

Thomas Jefferson:
Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786)

No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities....

We are free to declare, and do declare, that the rights hereby asserted are of the natural rights of mankind, and that if any act shall hereafter be passed to repeal the present or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural rights.

James Madison:
The First Amendment (1791)

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.

JEFFERSON, MASON, AND MADISON ON FREEDOM

Directions: Read the information about each person, and decide who you will “become” for the activity. Then make your case to your group members that you were the most important contributor to the First Amendment and freedom.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

what he did

- Wrote the Declaration of Independence (1776)
- Served in Paris during the Constitutional Convention, but wrote to Madison supporting the inclusion of a bill of rights
- Wrote the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786)
- Served as America’s first secretary of state, second vice president, and third president

what he said

A bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government, and what no just government should refuse, or rest on inference. (Letter to James Madison, 1787)

Erecting the ‘wall of separation between church and state,’ therefore, is absolutely essential in a free society. (Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, 1802)

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. (Declaration of Independence, 1776)

what others said about him

He was certainly one of the most learned men of the age. It may be said of him as has been said of others that he was a “walking Library,” and what can be said of but few such prodigies, that the Genius of Philosophy ever walked hand in hand with him.
–James Madison, 1826

[His writings are] a mass of taste, sense, literature, and science, presented in a sweet simplicity...which will be read with delight in future ages.
–John Adams, 1822

GEORGE MASON

what he did

- Wrote the Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776)
- Proposed adding a Bill of Rights to the Constitution at the Constitutional Convention in 1787. His proposal was defeated.
- According to Thomas Jefferson, came up with the idea for a bill of rights
- Believed that state governments could protect people's rights better than the national government
- Refused to sign the Constitution without a bill of rights because he believed it gave "no security" for individual rights

what he said

We came equals into this world, and equals shall we go out of it. All men are by nature born equally free and independent. (Fairfax County report, 1775)

There never was a government over a very extensive country without destroying the liberties of the people. (Virginia ratifying convention, 1788)

what others said about him

Colonel Mason left Philadelphia in an exceeding ill humor indeed.

–James Madison in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, on George Mason's refusal to sign the Constitution because it did not contain a bill of rights, 1787

George Mason it was who first gave concrete expression to those inalienable human rights that belong to every American citizen and that are today the bedrock of our democracy....[The] first ten amendments to our Constitution, which we call our Bill of Rights, were based on George Mason's great Declaration of Rights.

–President Harry Truman, 1949

JAMES MADISON

what he did

- Known as the “Father of the Constitution” (1787)
- Understood that many believed the Constitution did not fully protect individual rights
- First opposed adding a bill of rights, because rights were implied by the Constitution and it would be impossible to list every right
- Promised that a bill of rights would be added to satisfy concerns that it did not protect individual rights. Several states ratified the Constitution after he made this promise.
- Wrote the Bill of Rights as a member of the House of Representatives (1791)
- Served as America’s fourth president

what he said

The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the State governments are numerous and indefinite. (Federalist No. 45, 1788)

As a man is said to have a right to his property, he may be equally said to have a property in his rights. (Property, 1792)

what others said about him

Eloquence has been defined to be the art of persuasion. If it included persuasion by convincing, Mr. Madison was the most eloquent man I ever heard.
–Patrick Henry, November 12, 1796

Every person seems to acknowledge his greatness. He blends together the profound politician with the scholar.
–William Pierce, notes on the Constitutional Convention, 1787

THE FIRST AMENDMENT AND MY FREEDOM

Directions: For each of the five freedoms protected by the First Amendment, decide on five ways you can exercise that right responsibly as a citizen of the United States.

THE FIRST AMENDMENT

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.

RELIGION

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

SPEECH

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

PRESS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

ASSEMBLY

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

PETITION

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.