

Your First Amendment Rights

Part 1 of a 10-part series

Did You Know...?

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.

But what do these words mean? The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees you these five freedoms: religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition. The founders of our country included the First Amendment in the Constitution to protect these rights for *everyone* – including students, like you!

So What Can You Do?

In the United States, we live in a democracy – a government of the people, by the people, and for the people – where everyone’s opinion is important and encouraged. When the students at Goldenrod Elementary School were informed that their school was in trouble, they worked hard to find a solution. The First Amendment gives each of us the tools to find solutions to problems in our schools, communities, and country.

As students, you don’t leave your First Amendment rights at the door of the school building; however, responsibility and balance are two very important factors to consider when exercising freedoms. Kids just like you have used their First Amendment rights respectfully and responsibly to make a difference in their school and community.

“A right is not what someone gives you; it's what no one can take from you” – Ramsey Clark

For More Information

Visit the First Amendment Schools online!

www.firstamendmentschools.org

Your First Amendment Rights

Part 2 of a 10-part series

Did You Know...?

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees you the rights of religion, speech, press, assembly and petition. The freedom of speech encourages all people – including students – to express themselves with both passion and respect. Students have used their freedom of speech to make changes within their schools and beyond, bringing student voice into the community and nation at large.

So What Can You Do?

Does this mean that you can write whatever you want in a school newspaper or speech, without censorship from school officials, such as your teachers or principal?

No, not necessarily. School officials have the right to censor the content of speech in certain circumstances; they have the *responsibility* to maintain a healthy, safe school atmosphere. When free speech disturbs the education process, school officials have the right to stop it. This means that, as students and citizens, you are encouraged to exercise your First Amendment rights while respecting the rights of your peers and fellow citizens.

What do you think is important for people to talk about in your community? What action could you take to get people talking? How can you demonstrate respect for others' opinions and ideas?

“Responsibility is the price of freedom.” – Elbert Hubbard

For More Information

Visit First Amendment Schools online!

www.firstamendmentschools.org

Your First Amendment Rights

Part 3 of a 10-part series

Did You Know...?

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees you the rights of religion, speech, press, assembly and petition. The freedom of speech applies not only to the spoken word but also to the written word, including the press and literature. The First Amendment is especially important for those who represent the *minority* opinion; the right to the freedom of speech allows those in disagreement with the majority to express opposing viewpoints. As you read in the story, Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe are two examples of Americans who saw injustice in society and used their freedom of speech to show their opposition through literature. Through their work, these two individuals helped change the treatment of African Americans in the United States.

So What Can You Do?

As students, your First Amendment freedoms provide you with both rights and responsibilities. This means that if you see injustice in your school, whether it is on the playground or in the classroom, you have the right to voice your opinions and try to make a difference. For example, if you see a group bullying one of your peers on the playground, you have the right to use your voice and stick up for what is right.

Sometimes it can be scary to disagree and try to make a difference. Mark Twain and Harriett Beecher Stowe believed that even though it was scary, it was more important that they write about what they believe. Students just like you have used their freedom of expression as a form of protest against things such as inequality, war, or injustice. How do you use your voice to stand up for others? How do you tell people about your beliefs in ways that are respectful?

"The most certain test by which we judge whether a country is really free is the amount of security enjoyed by minorities." – Lord John Acton

For more information...

Visit First Amendment Schools on the web!

www.firstamendmentschools.org

Your First Amendment Rights

Part 4 of a 10-part series

Did You Know...?

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees you the rights of religion, speech, press, assembly and petition. The freedom of assembly gives all people the right to gather together in order to demonstrate a common set of beliefs. This part of the First Amendment encourages all people to take part in peaceful dialogue and debate, whether it is during school assemblies or town meetings. This freedom to assemble gives people a *forum* for respectful discussion.

So, What Can You Do?

As students, one way you can exercise this freedom to peaceably assemble is by forming student groups. You may form these groups about things that interest you as long as you remember respect and responsibility. You have the responsibility to follow the steps to form a new group at your school and must make sure that your group is respectful of others. Of course, that doesn't mean that your group has to agree with everyone else! Differences in opinion are allowed as long as each group treats members and other groups with respect. Teachers and faculty members have the responsibility to ensure a safe school environment and have the right to monitor these student groups.

For example, does the freedom of assembly give you the right to form groups such as the Recycling Club? Yes! How about a group to study safety at school? Yes to that too! This type of assembly helps your school and community get stronger. Within a school, sometimes groups negatively split or segregate the student body. Clubs that promote any unfair, hurtful separation of students do *not* responsibly exercise the First Amendment freedom of assembly. With rights come responsibilities, both in and out of school, for both students and adults alike.

Are there new ideas you could get started at your school with a group? Are there problems you could help solve?

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." – Margaret Mead

For more information...

Visit First Amendment Schools on the web!

www.firstamendmentschools.org

Your First Amendment Rights

Part 5 of a 10-part series

Did You Know...?

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees you the rights of religion, speech, press, assembly and petition. Sometimes a school limits those rights to keep everyone safe and to make sure that everyone can learn. This happens when they make rules about name-calling and bullying. It also happens when a school has a dress code.

Sometimes our government limits those rights too. Music is one place it happens a lot. Do you know of songs that can't be played on the radio or TV? That is because the government believes that they are so offensive that the artist's freedom of speech can be limited. Some people believe that the government should never limit someone's rights and that they should let people turn off the radio if they don't want to hear it.

So What Can You Do?

Questions about limiting freedoms are very hard to answer. Students like you have had their freedoms limited in the past and fought to ensure that these freedoms are not lost. This includes trying to change a dress code they thought was unfair, having "sit-ins" to change school policies, and writing articles in the school newspaper. Some adults think students should not have any freedoms because they don't know how to use them. Other adults think students should have opportunities to practice using their freedoms at school so that they can learn how to use them when they graduate.

What do you believe? Are there times when rights *should* be limited? How should children learn to use their rights with respect and responsibility?

"They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." - Benjamin Franklin

For more information...

Check out First Amendment Schools online!

www.firstamendmentschools.org

Your First Amendment Rights

Part 6 of a 10-part series

Did You Know...?

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees all people the right to religion, speech, assembly, petition and press. This leads to discussion and disagreement, since the First Amendment protects each individual's right to share his or her own opinions responsibly. Although disagreements may seem uncomfortable and create tension, they help you form your own opinions while showing appreciation for the challenger's belief. The First Amendment allows you to disagree respectfully, unlike Sluppy Dee who, instead, lied and deceived in order to get what he wanted. This sort of behavior is not respectful, nor protected under the First Amendment.

So What Can You Do?

Your First Amendment rights apply to you in all parts of your life, from the classroom to the playground to your home. You must balance *your rights* with the rights of others, like the students in the story. Instead of cheating or lying to achieve, the students worked hard, respecting each other and themselves, to win FreeZee's mansion. Using the tools provided by the First Amendment, you have the ability to disagree, and have healthy discussions to solve problems. By responsibly taking part in this valuable debate, you are exercising your rights while protecting the rights of others.

How do you demonstrate respect for others every day? Why is it important for people to disagree?

"Liberty is always dangerous, but it is the safest thing we have." – Harry Emerson Fosdick

For More Information...

Visit First Amendment Schools online!

www.firstamendmentschools.org

Your First Amendment Rights

Part 7 of a 10-part series

Did You Know...?

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees to all people the freedom of speech, press, assembly, petition, and religion. Petition is a method of showing opposition or disagreement by gathering support and peacefully protesting. To petition something, a person must have knowledge about the issue in order to petition responsibly and effectively. A petition is similar to a letter in which people ask for something to be changed. The writer of the petition then asks others to sign it if they agree.

So What Can You Do?

Do students have the right to petition? Yes! Students certainly can protest, as long as they do so responsibly and respectfully. Using your voice responsibly to make a difference is what the First Amendment is all about! When you write a petition, it is important to have reasons why you think something should be changed *and* an idea about how to change it. Many people complain about things they don't like, but don't try to change them. That is not a petition!

Sometimes the answer to your petition is "yes" and sometimes it is "no". Students in one school petitioned their principal to change the food at lunch time. He asked them to do some research about nutrition and to meet with the cafeteria manager before he said yes or no to their petition. Students in another school sent a petition to the mayor to ask for new sidewalks near an apartment complex so that children would not have to walk in the street. In their petition, they told the mayor about car accidents that had happened and explained how the sidewalk would make things safer. The mayor asked them to come to a special meeting to share their ideas.

How do you solve problems at your school? How do you share your ideas about solutions?

"I may not agree with what you say, but to your death I will defend your right to say it." – Voltaire

For More Information...

Visit First Amendment Schools online!

www.firstamendmentschools.org

Your First Amendment Rights

Part 8 of a 10-part series

Did You Know...?

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees the freedom of speech, press, assembly, petition, and religion. It says that the government cannot make someone be a certain religion or any religion, or keep anyone from being a certain religion. Another amendment, the Fourteenth, says that this includes schools. Schools can teach about religion and how it is important in history and literature, but they cannot make someone be religious or not.

So What Can You Do?

When you come to school, you may have very strong religious beliefs that are important to you and your family. The First Amendment lets you talk about those beliefs with others and even form groups about them outside of class time. However, you can't force people to believe what you do or threaten them if they don't. The First Amendment let's everyone choose to believe what they want to without being afraid that someone will make them stop.

Students at some schools have studied many religions to see how they are alike and different. They have made charts of how many people belong to one religion or another or none. This has helped them learn to respect other people's beliefs even if they disagree. There are wars in many places because people disagree about religion, but these schools are working peacefully to help people understand each other.

If you saw someone being picked on for being different, what would you do?

"Freedom is nothing else but a chance to be better." – Albert Camus

For More Information...

Visit First Amendment Schools on the web!

www.firstamendmentschools.org

Your First Amendment Rights

Part 9 of a 10-part series

Did You Know...?

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees the freedom of speech, press, assembly, petition, and religion. It gives you ways to solve problems through using your beliefs and your voice. Remember that it is important for you to use your voice respectfully and with responsibility. Of course, it is also important for you to have all the information you need!

So What Can You Do?

Do you see a problem in your school or community? Is there something you would like to change? In order to make a difference in your school and community, you, as students, must first learn as much as you can about the issues! For example, the students from Goldenrod Elementary School took many steps to reach their goals; without the skills to acquire the necessary knowledge, the students may not have saved their school! First, they recognized their problem and set an objective: they realized that their school was in trouble and decided to work toward solution. Next, the students brainstormed until they discovered a practical way to save their school. They worked closely with a teacher who supported and advised the students' initiative. Using their knowledge of history, geography, and logic, the students were able to work together and achieve their goal. As students, you can use this story as a guideline of how to use what you learn in school to exercise your rights and make a difference in your community.

"Liberty without learning is always in peril and learning without liberty is always in vain." – John F. Kennedy

For more information...

Visit First Amendment Schools online!

www.firstamendmentschools.org

Your First Amendment Rights

Part 10 of a 10-part series

Did You Know...?

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees everyone the freedom of religion, speech, assembly, petition, and press. This story proves that students have the ability to work together and achieve! Students are important in our communities because they can make change.

So What Can You Do?

Through your **mind, work, voice, and heart**, you have the ability to make a positive difference in your school, your community, and our country. You have ideas! You have knowledge! You have strong beliefs! And, you have the First Amendment to help you share your ideas, knowledge, and beliefs with others!

You can have a debate at school or start a newspaper. You can talk to your teachers and family about problems you see around you. You can gather others together to think about solutions and work hard to make them work. You can make a difference!

What will you do first?

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world” – Mahatma Gandhi

For More Information...

Visit First Amendment Schools online!

www.firstamendmentschools.org