



The Idea of Rights

Overview

In this lesson, you will examine a copy of twelve possible amendments to the United States Constitution as originally sent to the states for their ratification in September of 1789. Then, you will debate and vote on which of these amendments you would ratify and compare your resulting “Bill of Rights” to the ten amendments ratified by ten states that have since been known by this name.

Student Objectives

- Analyze a document as a primary source;
- Develop persuasive arguments;
- Gain insight into the process by which the Bill of Rights came to be.

Lesson Preparation

Brief Lesson Background

In September 1789, under the direction of John James Beckley, clerk of the United States House of Representatives and the first Librarian of Congress, twelve possible amendments to the Constitution were sent to the states for their ratification.

Lesson Procedure

1. Understanding documents.
 - What is a document?
 - What are examples of common documents?
2. Document 1
 - Examine the document.
 - Where does your eye go first?
 - How would you describe what you’re seeing? What do you notice about the physical condition?
 - Which words or phrases can you read? Has the document been altered in any way?
 - Are there any indications (e.g., names, dates) of ownership or time period?
 - Who do you think wrote this?
 - What do you think this document is about? What words or phrases give clues?
 - What about language, its tone and style? Type of print?
 - Do you think this is a public or private document? What might have been the author’s purpose in writing this?
 - Who might have been the intended readers?
 - Do you think this is the complete document or are pages missing?
 - What surprises you about what you’re seeing?
 - What do you want to know about this document?

Material provided without charge by St. Mary's University School of Law, <https://law.stmarytx.edu/>.

Source: the Library of Congress Lesson Plan for the Bill of Rights: Debating the Amendments, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/bill-of-rights/index.html>

3. What document is this?

4. What do you know about the Bill of Rights?
 - o How would you select which amendments to ratify?
5. Use the following process to analyze and present to your classmates an amendment for ratification.
 - o Identify unfamiliar vocabulary
 - o Analyze the amendment's wording (you can make notes on a separate piece of paper).
 - o Respond to the following questions on another piece of paper:
 - What is the specific right articulated in this amendment in your own words?
 - Do you think this amendment should be included in the Bill of Rights? Why or why not?
6. Be prepared to present and debate your analyses, by amendment, to the questions above.

Conclusion

1. We will hold a secret ballot on which of the twelve amendments should be ratified, and then compare our results to the real Bill of Rights!

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