



Chicago Historical Society



ARE WE FREE YET?

Grade level: Middle school through high school

Estimated time: Two to four class periods

Topic: Which documents guarantee the greatest, or the least, amounts of freedom?

Subtopic: Document analysis

Teacher background information

The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and Bill of Rights, and the Emancipation Proclamation are often collectively referred to as the Documents of Freedom. Together these documents demonstrate the evolution of American democracy and freedoms. This lesson encourages students to evaluate the level of freedom promised by each one of these documents. Prior to this lesson, students should have studied the events that led to the drafting of these documents.

Given time constraints, teaching purposes, and student reading proficiency, the number of documents used for this lesson can be limited to only two or three.

Key concept

Freedom is interpreted through the creation of government documents.

Key questions

Which Document of Freedom grants the greatest amount of personal freedom to the individual? Which grants the least?

Goal of this lesson

To determine and define the level of personal freedom granted by the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and Bill of Rights, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

Objectives

1. Students will read excerpts from the Documents of Freedom that pertain to personal freedom.
2. After reading each excerpt, students will answer a series of questions to evaluate the amount of freedom guaranteed by that document.
3. As a class, students will then rank the documents on a “Freedom Scale” to determine which document grants the greatest amount of personal freedom and which grants the least.



Materials

Master copies of the Reading Packet and the Freedom Scale are provided.

1. Reading Packet, containing directions, excerpts, vocabulary lists, and document questions for the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and Bill of Rights, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (one packet per group)
2. Freedom Scale (one copy to complete as a class)
3. Copies of the Documents of Freedom (for display, optional)

Procedures

1. On the board, write the names of the following Documents of Freedom: the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights to the Constitution, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. As a class, brainstorm why these documents, as a group, are called the “Documents of Freedom.”
2. Explain to the students that they will analyze excerpts from these four documents to understand the amount of personal freedom granted by each document. Before reading the excerpts, ask students to identify which document they think allocates the greatest amount of freedom.

After completing the lesson, students will evaluate their initial guesses.
3. Divide students into small groups. It is advisable to include a strong reader in each group, because some of the documents contain difficult language. Depending on the reading level of the students, consider reading each of the excerpts aloud as a class before dividing the class into small groups.

4. Distribute one Reading Packet to each group.
5. Review the Reading Packet directions with the students. Explain that the vocabulary list defines the bolded words in the excerpts, and encourage students to ask questions about other words that they do not understand.
6. Allow students ample time to review the document excerpts and answer the questions.
7. Post the Freedom Scale in the front of the room. Reconvene the class and direct their attention to the Freedom Scale. As a class, complete the chart. Remind students that it is not mandatory to use every category on the scale.
8. Conclude with a discussion to answer the question: Why do we have several documents that define freedom in the United States instead of just one? Ask students to evaluate their initial guesses about which document granted the most freedom. Ask, do you have the same opinions about the Documents of Freedom that you did at the start of the lesson? Why or why not?

Suggestions for student assessment

This lesson aims to help students understand that through a series of documents, individual freedoms in the United States have evolved over time. The success of this lesson depends on students’ ability to articulate their understanding of this concept both in their Reading Guides and during class discussion.

Additional resources

Foner, Eric. *The Story of American Freedom*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998.

Hakim, Joy. *From Colonies to Country: A History of Us., vol. 3*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Zinn, Howard. *A People’s History of the United States, 1492–Present*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2001.

Websites

The History Channel, "Save Our History: the Declaration of Independence," www.historychannel.com

U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, www.nara.gov

Extension activities

1. Distribute recent news magazines and newspapers. Ask students, individually or in small groups, to create collages representing each of the freedoms granted in the Documents of Freedom. Encourage students to include original artwork in their collages. These projects have the potential to be an interesting assessment of the students' understanding of the freedoms derived from each document.
2. Give each student a copy of the Freedom Scale. For homework, ask students to have a parent, grandparent, or other adult complete the worksheet. During the next class, discuss the results of the students' out-of-class research and compare those results with the results of the class's Freedom Scale.
3. Ask students to write a journal entry about freedom today. Ask them to consider: Are all of the freedoms we enjoy today rooted in the Documents of Freedom? Is it important for individual freedoms to be transcribed in document form in order to preserve them? Do we need a new document to define additional freedoms? Why or why not?

This lesson fulfills the following Illinois Learning Standards:

English Language Arts

State Goal 1: Read with understanding and fluency.

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

Social Science

State Goal 14: Understand political systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations.

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