Supplemental Lesson Plan

U.S. Laws: First Amendment Rights

Overview

Introduction

Refugees have compelling needs for protection and, by definition, have a well-founded fear of persecution, often from government authorities or from other powerful social entities. As refugees prepare to come to the United States, many are unfamiliar with the laws that protect their rights, and once they arrive, need encouragement to engage with their new government with trust. This lesson plan is designed to introduce refugees to some fundamental rights in the United States which many Americans may take for granted. It is designed to instill confidence in their safety and build a sense of civic pride and responsibility.

Key Messages

- The First Amendment is part of the United States Constitution and it protects freedoms of religion, speech, and the press, and the right to assemble peacefully and to petition the government.
- Citizens of the United States and other residents (including refugees) can participate in the public discourse in many ways and can take legal action for their protection, if necessary.

Lesson Objectives

After this lesson, refugees will be able to:

- Identify the First Amendment as part of the U.S. Constitution.
- Articulate the five freedoms, which are rights protected by the First Amendment: Religion, Speech, Press, Peaceful Assembly, Petition the Government.
- Acknowledge that the state laws protecting First Amendment rights can be different from one state to another.
- Recognize that the debate around the First Amendment is an ongoing right and responsibility of citizens and residents in the United States.

Applying Supplemental Lesson Plans

The First Amendment Rights lesson plan is not required, but may assist Cultural Orientation (CO) providers who are looking for ways to enhance the Cultural Adjustment and U.S. Laws sections of their CO curriculum.

In an overseas context, CO providers and their supervisors can decide to incorporate this lesson into their curriculum based on the needs of the refugee populations they serve and the level of pre-departure anxiety related to freedom and protection needs. In a domestic context, CO providers and their supervisors can decide to incorporate this lesson into their curriculum based on the level of welcoming support in the local community.

The lesson plan is a suggested guide and can be adapted according to circumstances and the creative wisdom of CO providers and their supervisors. It can be used, in whole or in part, depending upon need and time available.

A companion First Amendment Rights fact sheet has also been created which can serve as a take-home handout to emphasize the key messages of the lesson.

In an effort to reassure departing refugees, overseas CO providers should use caution when promising protection and acknowledge the limitations of First Amendment laws. As mentioned in the lesson, state laws all differ and some states offer more protection than others.

This CORE resource, and the companion fact sheet, are in the public domain. All CORE resources are free to access, download, and use.
SESSION PREPARATION

- Review the key vocabulary for the lesson.
- Explain that the U.S. Constitution is the foundation of law and
government for the country. Explain that it doesn't happen
often, but sometimes the Constitution needs to be changed.
These changes are called “Amendments”. The first, and some
would argue, the most critical amendment is the First
Amendment which protects individual freedom.
- Using the Five Freedoms game board pictures, explain the
First Amendment and describe the five freedoms it protects.
- Prepare participants for the Five Freedoms Game.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Five Freedoms game board and picture cards (1 set per group)
- Petition template (1 per group) (optional)
- First Amendment Rights Fact Sheet (1 per participant) (optional)

KEY VOCABULARY

- Constitution
- Bill of Rights
- Amendment
- Peaceful Assembly
- Petition
- Supreme Court

ACTIVITY BANK

THE FIVE FREEDOMS GAME

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Divide participants into small groups. If possible, ensure that at
least one person in each group is literate. *Please note that the use of
this lesson plan is discretionary.

2. Give each group a Five Freedoms game board and a set of the Five
Freedoms picture cards (See Appendix).

3. Ask one person in each group to read aloud the situation described
in the first box of the Five Freedoms game board; for example, he or
she will read, “A student presents a paper at school which criticizes
the government’s involvement in a war.”

4. Tell the group to discuss the situation described and select one of
the five freedoms picture cards to place next to that situation on the
game board; for example, the group should select the photo
representing freedom of speech and place it in the corresponding
box.

5. Ask the group to select the five freedoms picture cards best suited
to each of the situations described on the game board.

6. When all the groups have completed the game, have the groups
explain their choices and discuss any discrepancies between groups’
answers. (See Appendix for answers.)

7. Ask the group if they were surprised by any of the situations and
discuss.
WRITE A PETITION

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Divide participants into small groups. If possible, ensure that at least one person in each group is literate.

2. Give each group a petition template (See Appendix). Explain the different parts of the petition template. Tell them that you are the governor of the “State of Cultural Orientation.” Ask them to write to you making a petition for a change they’d like to see in the State of CO. Offer some examples, such as “provide more comfortable chairs, let us bring food to class, etc.” To manage expectations, you may want to add that the point of this activity is to learn how the petition process works as part of the democratic process. The “State of CO” is a hypothetical democracy, but in a real democracy, a petition is a formal means for voters to communicate their requests and political opinions to elected officials. A petition doesn’t always mean that the requests are granted, but when they are not, voters may decide not to re-elect their officials.

3. When each group has written and signed the petition, collect them and discuss.

4. Explain that groups and individuals are allowed to formally petition the local, state, and federal government in the United States and that this is regarded not only as a right but also a responsibility in order to make the country better. Many people take advantage of this opportunity every day in the United States.

DEBRIEF

1. What are the similarities and differences between the way an individual's freedom is protected in your country of origin (or country of first asylum) and the United States?

2. Many Americans highly value individuality and self-sufficiency. How do you think the First Amendment help preserve these values?

3. How do you think the First Amendment can protect you in the United States?

4. What could you do if you feel like your rights are not being respected?

MODIFICATIONS & TIPS

- CO providers may want to combine this lesson with guest visits from local law enforcement to build trust and understanding of systemic protection of refugee rights. They may also want to use this lesson to link refugees to local community-based organizations, or if necessary, to pro-bono legal aid.
A student presents a paper at school which criticizes the government’s involvement in a war. Which freedom is this student exercising?

A newspaper publishes an article that criticizes a speech given by a government official. Which freedom is being exercised here?

A teacher at a public school wants his students to say a prayer every morning, but the school board won’t allow him to do that. What freedom is being protected by the school board?

A group of people gather together in front of Congress to support legislation in favor of same-sex marriage. What freedom are these people exercising?

A man pickets a funeral of a soldier killed in combat with a sign that condemns homosexuality in the military. Which freedom is this man exercising?

A public park closes at 5 pm. A group of teenage boys who like to skateboard in the park send a letter to their city government requesting that the park stay open until 8 pm. Which freedom are the boys exercising?

A girl wants to wear a hijab at school. Which freedom is allows this?

A reporter asks a politician about money donated to her campaign by a wealthy businessman. Which freedom protects the reporter’s right to ask this question?
IMAGES FOR THE FIVE FREEDOMS GAME

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

FREEDOM TO PEACEFULLY ASSEMBLE

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

FREEDOM TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

FREEDOM TO PEACEFULLY ASSEMBLE

FREEDOM OF PRESS

FREEDOM OF PRESS

FREEDOM OF PRESS
CORRECT ANSWERS FOR THE FIVE FREEDOMS GAME

“A student presents a paper at school which criticizes the government's involvement in a war.”
Answer: Freedom of Speech *(Tinker v. Des Moines)*

“A newspaper publishes an article that criticizes a speech given by a government official.”
Answer: Freedom of Press

“A teacher at a public school wants his students to say a prayer every morning, but the school board won't allow him to do that.”
Answer: Freedom of Religion *(Engel v. Vitale)*

“A group of people gather together in front of Congress to support legislation in favor of same-sex marriage.”
Answer: Freedom to Peacefully Assemble

“A reporter asks a politician about money donated to her campaign by a wealthy businessman.”
Answer: Freedom of Press

“A girl wants to wear a hijab at school.”
Answer: Freedom of Religion

A public park closes at 5 pm. A group of teenage boys who like to skateboard in the park send a letter to their city government requesting that the park stay open until 8 pm.”
Answer: Freedom to Petition the Government

“A man pickets a funeral of a soldier killed in combat with a sign that condemns homosexuality in the military.” *(Snyder v. Phelps)*
Answer: Freedom of Speech
WRITE A PETITION TO THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF CULTURAL ORIENTATION

Dear ________________________________,

We, the undersigned, are writing today, to request that

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

We believe this is important because

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

We call on you, as our representative, to

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

We appreciate your consideration of this matter and look forward to supporting you with our vote in the next election.

Thank you.

Signed by:

________________________________________________   ________________________________

________________________________________________   ________________________________

________________________________________________   ________________________________
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

See below, several excellent websites which provided the historical background and educational support for this lesson plan. In particular, the Five Freedoms Game and Write a Petition exercise were modified from the Educational Resources available on the National Constitution Center website.

- National Constitution Center
- The First Amendment Center
- U.S. Courts First Amendment Activities

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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