



Rhode Island

LAW DAY

THE CONSTITUTION'S PROMISE:

OUT OF MANY,



ONE



Friday, May 2, 2025

**HIGH SCHOOL
PROGRAM GUIDE**



2025 RI LAW DAY

THE CONSTITUTION'S PROMISE: OUT OF MANY, ONE



This year's theme The **Constitution's Promise: Out of Many, One** recognizes that The United States Constitution embodies our collective responsibility to one another and urges us to take pride in a Constitution that bridges our differences to bring us together as One, one united nation, the United States of America.

Background: "E Pluribus Unum" and the Constitution

The phrase "E Pluribus Unum" means "Out of many, one." It appears on the Great Seal of the United States, adopted in 1782, and reflects the idea that people from many different backgrounds come together to form one nation.

The Constitution begins with the words "We the People, in Order to Form a More Perfect Union." This phrase reflects the idea of unity and collective responsibility, emphasizing the importance of inclusion and participation in governance.



Lesson One - The Bill of Rights and Protection of Freedoms

Introduction: What is the Bill of Rights?

The Bill of Rights is the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution. Ratified in 1791, these amendments were created to protect individual liberties and limit the power of the federal government. They guarantee fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, the right to a fair trial, and protection against unreasonable searches and seizures. These rights apply to everyone and form the foundation for the freedoms we enjoy as citizens.

Discussion Points for Presenters:

- **Protection of Fundamental Rights**

Ask Students: "How does freedom of speech help people from different backgrounds feel included?"

Possible Answer: This right allows everyone to express themselves and their beliefs, creating a society where people can be different but still feel like they belong.

- **Equality Under the Law**

Ask Students: "Why is it important that the law protects everyone equally?"

Possible Answer: It ensures that no group is treated unfairly and that everyone has the same protections

- **Encouragement of Civic Engagement**

Ask Students: "How do rights like free speech or protest help people get involved?"

Possible Answer: They allow people to speak up, vote, and influence change, helping everyone feel part of the country.

- **Conflict Resolution**

Ask Students: "What can people do if they feel the government isn't treating them fairly?"

Possible Answer: They can use the courts or other legal tools to make their voices heard, rather than resorting to violence.

- **Cultural Expression**

Ask Students: "Which rights help make sure everyone feels safe being themselves in a diverse society?"

Possible Answer: Freedom of speech and expression allow individuals to share their identity, language, art, or ideas, contributing to a respectful and inclusive community.

In essence, the Bill of Rights not only protects individual freedoms but also creates a foundation for a cohesive society that respects and celebrates its many backgrounds and perspectives.

Relevant Supreme Court Cases (Freedom of Expression Focus):

Let's discuss a few Supreme Court cases that have addressed the importance of individual freedom of expression. Here are some significant ones:

- **Tinker v. Des Moines (1969):** Students retain First Amendment rights at school; upheld students' right to wear black armbands in protest.
- **Texas v. Johnson (1989):** Flag burning is protected symbolic speech under the First Amendment.
- **Cohen v. California (1971):** Protected the right to wear a jacket with a controversial slogan as free speech.

- **New York Times Co. v. Sullivan (1964)**: Strengthened press freedoms by requiring proof of actual malice in libel cases involving public officials.
- **Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier (1988)**: Schools may exercise editorial control over student newspapers if their actions are reasonably related to legitimate educational concerns.
- **Mahanoy Area School District v. B.L. (2021)**: The Court ruled in favor of a student who was suspended from the cheerleading team for a profanity-laced Snapchat made off campus.

Together, these cases demonstrate the Supreme Court's steadfast commitment to protecting freedom of expression, even when the views expressed are unpopular or contentious.

Activity: How Do Individual Rights Promote Unity?

Introduction:

The Bill of Rights protects many of the freedoms we enjoy today, such as the right to speak our minds, practice any religion, and gather with others to share ideas. These rights do more than protect individuals. They help create a society where people with different opinions, backgrounds, and beliefs can live and work together. In this activity, we will look at how these rights, especially those in the First Amendment, help people feel included, respected, and connected as members of the same country.

Class Discussion

Ask the students the following questions:

- *How do individual rights help bring people together in a country where people come from different backgrounds?*
- *Why is unity important in a country with many viewpoints and experiences?*

Have students brainstorm answers in pairs or small groups. Ask each group to share one idea with the class.

Possible Responses from Students

- **Shared values**: like freedom and fairness help bring people together.
- **Inclusion and Participation**: when everyone's rights are protected, people feel included and heard.
- **Conflict Resolution**: rights give peaceful ways to solve problems instead of fighting.
- **Civic Responsibility**: Knowing your rights are protected makes people more likely to get involved and vote.

- **Cohesion:** respecting different beliefs while protecting everyone's rights helps people live together.
- **Rule of Law:** fair laws that apply to everyone build trust in the system and help keep the country united.

First Amendment in Focus

Review the five freedoms of the First Amendment:

- **Religion**
- **Speech**
- **Press**
- **Assembly**
- **Petition**

These freedoms and rights guaranteed by the First Amendment teach us to respect the viewpoints of others even if we disagree with them and help to bring unity to people and our country.

Group Work:

Break students into 5 groups. Assign each group one freedom.

Have them answer:

- *What does this freedom allow people to do?*
- *How might this freedom help people feel included and respected in society?*

After allowing 5-10 minutes for discussion have each group share their answers. Encourage students to give simple examples (e.g., peaceful protest, starting a newspaper, writing to Congress).

Final Wrap-Up – Reflection Question:

Ask Students: *How does protecting individual freedoms help people live together peacefully when they have different beliefs or experiences?*

Allow students to share their answers aloud with the group.

To wrap up, we've seen how the rights protected by the Bill of Rights—especially the freedoms in the First Amendment—do more than protect individuals. They help people from many different walks of life live and work together by making sure everyone has a voice, is treated fairly, and can participate in shaping their communities. These rights create a stronger, more connected country.

Lesson Two - How Amendments Strengthen Unity

Introduction:

The Constitution was written to create a strong government, but it also allows for change through the amendment process. Over time, amendments have expanded rights to more people, helping the country become more fair and more connected. This lesson focuses on how those changes have helped people feel more included and supported by the law.

Quick Overview: How Amendments Happen

The Constitution was designed to last a long time, but also to change when necessary. The amendment process makes sure that changes are thoughtful and widely supported.

Here's how it works:

- **Proposal:** An amendment can be proposed in two ways:
 - By two-thirds of both the House and Senate, or
 - By a national convention called by two-thirds of state legislatures (this has never happened).
- **Ratification:** Once proposed, it must be approved by three-fourths of the states (either by their legislatures or by state conventions).

Because this process is so difficult, only **27 amendments** have been added to the Constitution since it was written in 1787. That means every amendment reflects a major moment when the country agreed that something needed to change—often to expand rights, fix problems, or create more fairness.

Reflection Activity

Introduction:

Ask students to pick one amendment from the list below. Read the short summary, then think about how it helped more people feel included and protected under the law.

Suggested amendments to choose from:

- **13th Amendment (1865):** Ended slavery in the United States.
- **14th Amendment (1868):** Made sure all people born in the U.S. are citizens and must be treated equally under the law.
- **19th Amendment (1920):** Gave women the right to vote.
- **26th Amendment (1971):** Lowered the voting age to 18.

Discussion Prompt:

Give students a moment to select one amendment to focus on. Then ask them to consider this question:

- *"How did this amendment help bring people together or help more individuals feel included and recognized as full members of the country?"*

Give students about five minutes to write down their responses. Then invite volunteers to share their thoughts with the group.

Possible Student Answers:

13th Amendment (Abolished slavery):

- Ended slavery and helped move the country toward equality.
- Gave freedom to millions of people who had been treated as property.
- Was a step toward recognizing the rights of all people.

14th Amendment (Citizenship and equal protection):

- Made sure people born in the U.S. were full citizens, including formerly enslaved individuals.
- Helped guarantee equal treatment under the law.
- Sent a message that everyone deserves the same rights, no matter their background.

19th Amendment (Women's right to vote):

- Allowed women to have a voice in government for the first time.
- Helped women feel more equal and represented.
- Expanded the idea of who counts as a full citizen.

26th Amendment (Lowered voting age to 18):

- Gave younger people a say in decisions that affect them.
- Showed that the government values the voices of all adults, not just older ones.
- Helped more people feel included in the democratic process.

Final Wrap-Up:

Amendments show that the Constitution is a living document that can grow and change to meet the needs of the people. Over time, these changes have helped expand rights and protections, making more people feel seen, heard, and valued as full members of the country. By correcting injustices and including more voices in the democratic process, amendments have played a key role in building a stronger, fairer, and more unified nation.

Presenter Notes: Using These Lessons Together

These two lessons were designed to give students a deeper understanding of how the Constitution protects individual rights and promotes unity. While each lesson can stand alone, they also work well together as a connected sequence.

Lesson One focuses on the Bill of Rights, with special attention to the First Amendment and how these freedoms help people feel included and respected in a shared society.

Lesson Two explores how the amendment process has expanded rights over time and helped bring more people into full participation in the nation.

How to Use These Lessons

- Presenters can choose to lead one or both lessons, depending on time and interest.
- If only one lesson is used, we recommend Lesson One as a foundation.
- If time allows, follow with Lesson Two to show how the Constitution can adapt to promote unity and inclusion over time.

Companion Materials

Please refer to the PowerPoint presentation included with this packet. The slides correspond to key points and activities in both lessons and are intended to support discussion, visuals, and pacing.



The 2025 RI Law Day Program Guide is presented by the Rhode Island Law Day Committee comprised of members of the Rhode Island Judiciary, Rhode Island Bar Association, Rhode Island Police Chief's Association, Rhode Island Department of Education, and the Roger Williams University School of Law.