

**Title:** “The Bill of Rights: Cutting It Down to Size,” Karasonya Whitehead, Baltimore City

This lesson explores the significance of the Bill of Rights by creating a governmental time capsule that will include a new Bill of Rights and a one-page guiding statement on how to create and maintain a government

**Grade Level:** 8

**Duration:** Two 70-minute class periods

**Content Area/Subject:** Government

History: Students will examine significant ideas and beliefs; organize patterns and events; and analyze how individuals and the society have changed over time.

Political Science: Students will understand the historical development and current status of the fundamental processes of authority, power and influence, with particular emphasis on the democratic skills and attitudes necessary to become responsible citizens.

**Objective:**

This lesson will analyze the significance of the Bill of Rights and its importance in our democracy.

**Key Skills:** Debate, Analysis, Persuasion, Comparing and Contrasting

**Materials Needed/ Resources for Teacher Preparation**

- Attached Bill of Rights (for handouts and overhead)
- The Constitution of the United States of America, *Creating America* Textbooks, Group Journals (one for each co-operative working group)

**Student Preparation**

Students should have read about the following a) the Bill of Rights; b) The Constitutional Convention and how the Founding Fathers shaped the Articles of Confederation and The Constitution; c) The Constitution of the United States of America and how it framed/s our nation. Students should bring their journals to class.

**Lesson Development**

**(Day One)**

**Warm-Up**

(write instructions on board):

Write a 1-paragraph (3-5 sentences) interpretation of the following statement and be prepared to share. “The Constitution belongs to the living, not the dead.” - *Thomas Jefferson*

(Goal: to help the students to understand that the Constitution is a “living” document and is always, in each generation, being interpreted and studied by the judicial branch)

**Activities**

Using the overhead, the teacher will take the class through a brief discussion of the first 10

amendments, divide the class into co-operative groups of 4-5 students and then explain the following:

“The President just called and said that due to a nuclear attack, the world as we know it will cease to exist in 70m. He has asked your class to prepare a governmental time capsule for the next generation. He wants your capsule to include two things: 1) five of the ten amendments to the constitution (must be from the first ten amendments) and 2) a one-page guiding statement of the best way for the next generation to create their own government.”

The students should then be instructed to take notes in their group journal indicating the amendments they choose to keep and why.

**Independent Practice:** Students will then decide as a group which rights they are willing to keep for the next generation and which ones they are willing to give up and why. The group will then write a guiding statement on the best ways to create and maintain a government.

**Share /Reflection:**

Students will reflect on how well their group worked together. They will also highlight which of the five amendments were the most important to them and why.

**Home Assignment (Day 1):**

Using their personal journal, students will take the five amendments they chose to give up as a group and write about what the world would be like if these rights were really taken away.

**(Day 2)**

**Summary**

Each group will choose a reporter to share their decisions with the class.

The class will react to their decisions and discuss (or debate).

The class will then vote on the top five amendments to be submitted to the time capsule as a whole class.

Using all of the statements on the best way to create and maintain a government as basis, the class will then write one group statement to be submitted by the entire class to the time capsule.

**Thoughtful Application of Knowledge/Assessment**

When the activity is completed, explain to students why each of the Ten Amendments is important to our society and why they were important to the Founding Fathers.

The writing assignment will be given over a two-day period and the teacher will spend a significant portion of the first class period going over each amendment and its significance in detail.

**Possible Extension Activities**

Students could be asked to read the Maryland State Constitution and reflect on the impact the Bill of Rights has on this document.

They could be asked to write six one-paragraph letters (circa 1778) between a Revolutionary War soldier and a Maryland delegate about the Bill of Rights. These would be posted in the class.

- I Freedom of Speech, Press, Religion and Petition
- II Right to keep and bear arms
- III Conditions for quarters of soldiers
- IV Right of search and seizure regulated
- V Provisions concerning prosecution VI - Right to a speedy trial, witnesses, etc.
- VII Right to a trial by jury
- VIII Excessive bail, cruel punishment
- IX Rule of construction of Constitution
- X Rights of the States under Constitution

## **I - Freedom of Speech, Press, Religion and Petition**

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.

## **II - Right to keep and bear arms**

A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State and the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.

## **III - Conditions for quarters of soldiers**

No soldier shall, in time of peace, be quartered in any house without the consent of the owner; nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

## **IV - Right of search and seizure regulated**

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

## **V - Provisions concerning prosecution**

No person shall be held to answer for a capital or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the militia, when in actual service in time of war or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself; nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation.

## **VI - Right to a speedy trial, witnesses, etc.**

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the assistance of counsel for his defense.

## **VII - Right to a trial by jury**

In suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury shall be otherwise reexamined in any court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

## **VIII - Excessive bail, cruel punishment**

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

## **IX - Rule of construction of Constitution**

The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

## **X - Rights of the States under Constitution**

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.