

Generally the First Amendment, as taught in elementary school, focuses on freedom of expression. When freedom of religion is taught the controversy is avoided. Teachers often teach freedom of speech but how in detail do they go? Religion is a controversial issue and can touch raw nerves fairly easy. The American country was founded by a mixture of religious ideas. However these ideas are not popular now. How can Amendment One be taught to give understanding without upsetting the community?

Westvale Elementary, in Jordan school district, had scheduled a history trip to the L.D.S. church history museum in Salt Lake City. They intended to show the students the early pioneer history and avoid the religious sections. The staff had assured the teachers that there would be no discussion of religion and they would steer the children clear of any overtly proselytizing exhibits. However some in the area that did not have children at the school objected and barraged the 4<sup>th</sup> grade team, the principal and the district administration with negative feedback. Eventually some of these protestors discovered the time the trip was to take place and posted it online and on Facebook. The trip was scrapped due to safety concerns. On the other polar opposite I was forced as a child to take part in prayers prior to student activities that I objected too. Where is the middle ground? The founding fathers did not intend for religion to be removed from daily activity. States had the right to enforce religious activity in secular life until the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

The trick is to teach the freedoms in the First Amendment without offense. At the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level that can be as simple as focusing on basic freedom of expression. No need to discuss the Westboro Baptist church or the atheists upset over placement of monuments. Students by this age have a pretty good idea that talking about religion at school is taboo. However mentioning that the First Amendment allows those in the U.S.A. to be any religion including Mormon, Catholic, Muslim or even no religion.

Students will be put into groups and given a question that they will discuss and write up a 2-3 minute response that will be shared with the rest of the class. A couple of examples of the questions will be: 1). Yolanda Highsmith operated a newspaper for the African-American community in a large city. In her newspaper, she often criticized the mayor and city council. 2). Rick Jackson stood in front of an oil company's office. He held a sign that said "Don't buy oil from polluters". More examples can be found at: <http://www.freedomforum.org/packages/first/curricula/educationforfreedom/supportpages/L01-FirstAmendmentRights.htm>

In discussion the freedom of religion it will be worthwhile to mention that this right does not start or begin with amendment one. Also teaching that this freedom has been one that has evolved before the first settlers arrived on the North American continent and continues to evolve. The fathers of the constitution differed in regards to their ideas for religious liberty. Ultimately it was one of compromise

<http://www.freedomforum.org/packages/first/curricula/educationforfreedom/BriefHistory.htm> 5/14).

In discussing our First Amendment right we will be talking about the Civil war and how with the end of this war the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was drafted. This bill overrode states' rights in regard to their citizens and made the rights equal to all citizens in all states, Section one of this Amendment states:

“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

The United States Constitution was not set up to be a true democracy. It ended up being a compromise between a republican form of government and a democratic form. The ideas set forth in the constitution would seem to suggest that minorities should be protected. However it seems that there are those that wish to force religion and those that wish to force non-religion. In teaching younger grades, care should be taken but this important freedom must be taught.