

## FREE SPEECH: WHY IT MATTERS

### LESSON PLAN

#### Objectives:

- Students will discuss/debate the topic of free speech using a range of arguments.
- Students will relate the topic of free speech to current affairs.
- Students will develop claims and counterclaims fairly, while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both claims.
- Students will use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic and convey a style appropriate to the discipline and context as well as to the expertise of likely readers.

#### Materials:

ARTICLE: Choose from two recent case studies that discuss a recent free speech controversy. Find cloze exercises of these articles attached to this PDF.

- a) [The NBA Gives in to China's Pressure](#)
- b) [Free Speech in College: How Free Should It Be?](#)

VIDEO: [Why Free Speech Matters](#) provides three reasons this right benefits Americans.

- a) [Information debate sheet](#) describing three arguments for free speech, and three common arguments against it.
- b) [Comprehension quiz](#)
- c) [Discussion worksheet](#)

#### Procedure:

1. Choose a topic currently popular in the news or students' surroundings – tell them that they are not allowed to talk about it anymore, unless what they say matches a certain viewpoint chosen by you. This could be serious, or a silly example like “pistachio is officially the best ice-cream flavour and anybody who says otherwise will be punished.” Gauge student reactions and give them a chance to object – you could perform a vote on whether they agree with the “official” position.
2. Broaden the discussion to free speech in general – ask students how they would react if they were no longer allowed to express their opinions on political topics.
3. Ask students where the right to free speech comes from. Elicit any background information they may have.

4. Display video [Why Free Speech Matters](#)

Suggested places to stop the video and ask questions:

- 1:00 – Where is the right to freedom of speech guaranteed?
  - 1:00 – What does the First Amendment restrict?
  - 1:25 – What form of government does the U.S. have?
  - 1:42 – Discuss Nadine Strossen quote
  - 2:17 – Discuss Lindsay Shepard quote
  - 2:50 – What forms of speech/methods of communication does the First Amendment protect?
  - 3:59 – What regimes hold their power by limiting speech?
  - 4:47 – Why was freedom of speech listed first in the Bill of Rights?
  - 4:56 – Discuss George Washington quote
5. Students complete [comprehension quiz](#).
  6. Students complete [discussion worksheet](#) individually or in groups.
  7. Have students complete an attached case study cloze exercise – choose between *The NBA Gives in to China's Pressure* and *Free Speech in College: How Free Should It Be?*  
Alternatively, prepare another recent news article as a case study.
  8. Have students write a 100 word summary of the chosen article, including the key points.
  9. Hold a discussion about the case study. This can also be completed in small groups.  
Questions may include...

*The NBA Gives in to China's Pressure*

- a) Do you think Daryl Morey should have said what he did?
- b) What should the NBA have done?
- c) Are business interests more important than free expression?
- d) What do you think of the Hong Kong protests?
- e) What do you know about life in China?

*Free Speech in College: How Free Should It Be?*

- a) If you had to write a set of principles for schools to obey on speech, what would they be?
- b) Should schools and colleges have rules limiting speech? Why/why not?
- c) Who was right – Dr. Maroja or the protesters?
- d) Are safe spaces a good idea? Do you have any at school, or should you? What would you expect to experience in a safe space?
- e) Does offensive speech affect you? If so, how?

*Extension:* Students may further research their case studies by finding news stories on the Hong Kong protests, the Chinese government, the Chicago Principles, or speech protests on college campuses.

*Extension:* Students read the article [First Amendment: Protecting the Right to Disagree](#).

*Extension:* Have student research and present a legal exception to free speech. This may include...

- Incitement
- Fighting Words
- Obscenity
- Defamation
- Commercial Speech
- Other compelling interests: Judges' gag orders, certain government interests, jurors discussing cases, etc.

*Extension:* The First Amendment only protects free speech in the U.S. – some other countries prosecute citizens for speech deemed unacceptable. Hate speech is increasingly being prosecuted in Canada, the U.K. and Europe. Have students find a recent news article on free speech infringements from a country outside the U.S. and discuss it from an American perspective. Students may prepare a written analysis or verbal presentation.

## The NBA Gives in to China's Pressure

Read the article and fill in the gaps using words in the box.

The National Basketball Association (NBA) has been in the news lately due to controversy over \_\_\_\_\_ made by one of its managers. Daryl Morey, the owner of the Houston Rockets, supported people who are fighting for their rights in Hong Kong, a \_\_\_\_\_ that is ruled by the Chinese government. His comments angered the People's Republic of China, and the \_\_\_\_\_ threatened to stop doing business with the NBA. The basketball league has an agreement with China to \_\_\_\_\_ games to the Chinese people. This deal makes the NBA a large sum of money.

The Chinese government threatened to stop the agreement because of Morey's comments. The NBA responded by \_\_\_\_\_ to China for the owner's remarks \_\_\_\_\_ the Hong Kong protesters, who want the same rights that Americans enjoy in the United States. Later, the Houston Rockets owner apologized on Twitter, saying, "I did not intend my tweets to cause any \_\_\_\_\_ to Rockets fans and friends of mine in China."

### Free Speech

The right to \_\_\_\_\_ of expression stops the U.S. \_\_\_\_\_ from punishing Americans who express their opinions. While it keeps citizens safe from the government, it does not protect people from other \_\_\_\_\_ that can result from a point of view that others do not like.

The notion of free speech is \_\_\_\_\_ in American culture. Americans have supported the idea that people should be allowed to express their \_\_\_\_\_ openly, even if nobody else likes them, without being punished.

### Communism and Free Speech

The People's Republic of China is led by a communist government and Chinese citizens do not enjoy the \_\_\_\_\_ to free speech. They can speak freely as long as they do not say anything negative about the government.

If a Chinese person makes comments that criticize the communists in charge, they could be arrested and put in prison. The country is well known for punishing people who speak out against Chinese \_\_\_\_\_. Now, international business deals are threatened when Americans criticize the Chinese government.

Free speech is one of the most important rights protected by the \_\_\_\_\_. Without it, Americans would be unable to say what they want. They would live in the fear that they might say something to catch the attention of the state. For this, Americans should be grateful for the First Amendment and fight hard to \_\_\_\_\_ it.

ingrained	regarding	comments	consequences	Constitution	city
offense	protect	country	right	politicians	freedom
thoughts		government	apologizing		broadcast

## Free Speech in College: How Free Should It Be?

Read the article and fill in the gaps using words in the box.

Just how far does freedom of speech go in college? How much freedom should people have to express possibly offensive ideas? The First \_\_\_\_\_ to the U.S. Constitution promises that the \_\_\_\_\_ won't get in the way of free speech, but many schools make rules against sharing some ideas.

### The Chicago Principles

Dr. Luana Maroja, who \_\_\_\_\_ biology at Williams College in Massachusetts, is worried about free speech. She wanted the school to adopt the Chicago Principles, which the University of \_\_\_\_\_ made in defense of free speech. More than 60 colleges follow the Chicago Principles. Dr. Maroja got more than 100 teachers at Williams to agree to these guidelines, but Williams College announced in July 2019 that it would not adopt the Chicago Principles.

What happened? Many pupils and teachers think free speech is \_\_\_\_\_. Some students interrupted a staff meeting in November 2018, holding signs with messages like "free speech \_\_\_\_\_." They even claimed the faculty members who agreed to the Chicago Principles wanted to kill them. The College Fix \_\_\_\_\_ reported that one professor threatened violence if the school \_\_\_\_\_ the guidelines.

Williams is a private college, so the First Amendment doesn't stop it from making rules about speech. The fear of free speech is becoming more common even at public schools. The \_\_\_\_\_ for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) says that more than 90% of the nation's public colleges have some rules for speech on \_\_\_\_\_.

### Safe Spaces

Some schools treat the campus as a \_\_\_\_\_ and try to protect students from hearing \_\_\_\_\_ they don't like. Some only let people share certain ideas in special "free speech zones." Some want professors to give students "trigger warnings" to let them know they might hear something offensive or \_\_\_\_\_ in class.

Some say that feeling safe encourages students to participate more. They believe that trigger warnings and safe spaces \_\_\_\_\_ free speech, not stop it. Others think college is a place where people should hear ideas and decide for \_\_\_\_\_ what to believe, even if they might not like what they hear. Can a balance be found? Just how free should \_\_\_\_\_ be on campus?

government	Foundation	themselves	government
safe space	adopted	dangerous	shocking
	opinions	Amendment	campus
teaches		Chicago	speech



## Why Free Speech Matters

George Orwell said, "If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not need to hear." In the video "Why Free Speech Matters," you heard three reasons why this provision in the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment to the Constitution is so important. Three of the top **three reasons** are:

1. **It's what keeps us free people:** Free speech allows us to criticize or debate about the people we elect without fear of retribution.
2. **It protects the ways we communicate:** In other words, Americans have the freedom to express themselves without fear of government violence. This covers all forms of speech, including communication on social media.
3. **It protects minority opinion:** Just because someone may not have the popular opinion does not mean they do not have the right to voice their thoughts.



America is a free nation, but it is becoming increasingly common to hear people argue against the value of free speech. What might be some arguments **against** free speech?

1. **It can promote hate speech:** One of the most prominent modern arguments is that the ability to speak freely allows for "unacceptable" or hate speech. College campuses across the nation have had protests where students argue this very point. The question is, who will decide what is considered an acceptable opinion and what is deemed hate speech?
2. **It can be misleading:** The ability to state what's on a person's mind doesn't mean that statement is the truth. Some argue that the freedom to say anything has led to the public believing opinions or false information rather than facts.
3. **It can provoke violence:** Another concern is that some opinions are so disliked by those in disagreement that violence breaks out. Allowing free speech at schools and public places, some say, can instigate a riot or other violent confrontation.



# Why Free Speech Matters

**Test Your Knowledge:** Answer the questions based on the video and information sheet, “Why Free Speech Matters:”

1. Which Amendment in the Constitution guarantees free speech?
  - a) 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment
  - b) 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment
  - c) 3<sup>rd</sup> Amendment

2. The United States is a Constitutional \_\_\_\_\_ with a Democratic form of government.
  - a) Democracy
  - b) Socialist
  - c) Republic

3. Social media posts and even notebook sketches and doodles are protected under freedom of speech:

True / False

4. Who said, “Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech?”
  - a) George Washington
  - b) Benjamin Franklin
  - c) John Adams

5. What percentage of young people want to limit free speech by changing the Constitution?
  - a) Less than 20%
  - b) Nearly 60%
  - c) More than 75%

6. What are three benefits of freedom of expression:

---

---

---



# Why Free Speech Matters

**Discussion:** Answer the questions based on the video and information sheet, "Why Free Speech Matters." What is your opinion on free speech and expression?

1. The 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment gives Americans the right to express themselves and their thoughts without fear of repercussion. Opponents suggest it opens the door for hate speech. Which do you think is the stronger argument, and why?

---

---

2. The idea behind freedom of speech is that everyone, no matter their opinion, has a right to express it. How is this beneficial to minority opinions that might not sit favorably with the majority of people? Provide some examples of how this has helped with social issues throughout history.

---

---

3. Why do you think the Founding Fathers wrote freedom of speech into the Bill of Rights? Do you think their reasoning still applies in today's world?



---

---

---

---

---

4. Should speech be regulated by the government? If so, how much and how would such rules be enforced?

---

---

5. Imagine freedom of speech was taken away: how would this impact your life? How would it affect American citizens?

---

---