

### Lesson Overview

You have two options for conducting this lesson: either as a whole-class activity with small-group breakouts (Online Together) or as an individual or small-group assignment (Independent Learning). In this lesson, students decide which of the rights included in the Constitution's Bill of Rights they value the most. First, students watch a slideshow that discusses the basic rights of all Americans. Next, they watch a slideshow that presents a story about a hypothetical extraterrestrial creature that takes over the world. The creature will allow humans to keep three rights. Finally, students work individually or in small groups to decide on the three rights they find most important and report back their findings.

### Materials & Preparation

Online Together	Independent Learning
<a href="#"><u><i>Our Rights &amp; Freedoms: Visitor From Outer Space</i></u></a> slideshow	<a href="#"><u><i>Our Rights &amp; Freedoms: Visitor From Outer Space</i></u></a> slideshow
<a href="#"><u><i>Handout A – Rights and Freedoms</i></u></a> that can be displayed on screen for students to see while doing the activity.	<a href="#"><u><i>Handout A – Rights and Freedoms</i></u></a> that can be emailed to and/or posted for students to use individually or in small groups.

### Objectives

Students will:

- Understand that the Bill of Rights is a part of the U.S. Constitution.
- Decide what rights are most important to them.

### Procedure

#### I. Online Together Option

##### A. Focus Discussion

1. With the class convened through your distance-learning platform, ask students:

- Can you name a few basic rights that all Americans have? *Accept reasoned responses. Students may name: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the right to vote, etc.*
- In what historical document can these rights be found? *Students may respond with the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.*

2. Inform students that today they are going to get a refresher on what the Framers of the Constitution created at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and again in 1791. They will then find out how a “visitor from outer space” will help them evaluate which rights and freedoms they consider to be the most important.

## II. Slideshow Presentation

A. Present [Our Rights & Freedoms: Visitor From Outer Space](#) (slideshow) to students, pausing along the way to answer questions. The following notes on specific slides may help answer questions that come up.

### Specific Slide Notes

#### Slide 2

The delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 devised the new government described in the Constitution on three main principles: federalism, separation of powers, and a republican form of government (or representative democracy in which leaders are elected by the people).

#### Slide 3

The delegates had to answer these important questions.

#### Slide 4

James Madison and George Mason were both delegates from Virginia. Mason would become one of three who did not sign the Constitution in order to approve it. Ironically, Madison opposed adding a bill of rights but later changed his opinion and became known as the “Father of the Bill of Rights.”

#### Slide 6

The religion clauses are the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. The phrase “separation of church and state” does not appear in the Bill of Rights. It was a phrase first used by Thomas Jefferson in 1802 to explain the meaning of the Establishment Clause.

#### Slide 8

The 5th and 6th amendments mostly deal with the rights of people accused of crimes. The 5th Amendment also protects everyone’s right to *due process of law*, which means that the government must respect each person’s legal rights to “life, liberty, and property.”

#### Slide 9

The U.S. Supreme Court has clarified that the 7th Amendment protects the right to a jury trial in a civil case in federal courts, not in state courts. Adjusting for inflation, \$20 is roughly \$300 today. But Congress has set the minimum amount in dispute in a lawsuit to \$75,000 when the parties are from different states or different countries for a jury trial to be required.

#### Slide 10

The process for amending the Constitution is described in Article V of the Constitution. Generally, if two-thirds of both houses of Congress and three-fourths of state legislatures vote to pass an amendment, it will be added to the U.S. Constitution. The Constitution has been amended 27 times in our nation’s history, including the Bill of Rights.

#### Slide 11

Historians and legal scholars call the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments the “Civil War

Amendments.” The 14th Amendment extended the protection of due process of law to state governments so that both states and the federal government are prohibited from infringing on those rights.

Slide 14

Any pronunciation of the strange words here is acceptable!

### III. A Visitor From Outer Space Activity

A. Display Slide 16 (the list of amendments) on the screen.

B. Email or otherwise share [Handout A – Rights and Freedoms with students](#).

C. Students choose their most valued amendments.

1. If students answer individually — As they review the list of amendments on the screen, they may take a few minutes (from 10 to 15 minutes recommended) to choose their top three and record their reasons for choosing those three.

2. If students answer in small groups — Have students work as a small group, either through a shared document or in a small videoconference breakout, to reach a *unanimous* decision on their top three. They should submit one completed handout to you with all of their group members’ names indicated on the handout.

a. **TIP:** This is a good opportunity to explain the difference between unanimous and majority-rule decision-making. Unanimous decisions require negotiating and consensus-building, whereas majority decisions, although much speedier, do not reflect the opinions of all.

b. Tell students that they can presume that any rights not included on the list have not been taken away.

D. Students should also list the four amendments they did not choose as their top three with reasons why.

E. In a class session, hold a discussion on each of the debriefing questions on Slide 17.

### IV. Independent Learning Option

A. Direct students to view the [Our Rights & Freedoms: A Visitor From Outer Space](#) slideshow. Encourage students to communicate questions they may have to you. Use the **Specific Slide Notes** above to help you answer any questions they may have.

B. Follow steps III(B) and III(C)(1) or III(C)(2) above, except that the 10 to 15-minute recommended limit does not apply for individual students to choose the top three amendments in real time.

1. Students may work independently, either individually or in small groups, to complete the handout as an assignment and submit their completed handouts to you.

C. Have students write short answers to each of the debriefing questions on Slide 17.

# RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Everyone living in the United States has individual freedoms guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution's *Bill of Rights*. What would life be like if somebody took away your rights? Are some rights more important than others? How would you decide which rights were the most important? Think about these questions while you read the following scenario.

## VISITOR FROM OUTER SPACE

It is the year 2080 and you are watching your holographic television when a special news bulletin comes on. A strange, alien-like creature appears on the screen and informs you that he has taken over the United States. You rapidly flick through 10,000 channels but find he is on every one:

“ATTENTION”, he begins, “I am Sthgir from planet Noitutitsnoc. Just as I have taken over television, I will take over your lives, but I come in peace. I realize that individual freedom means a great deal to American citizens.

Consequently, I will not take away all of your rights; you have a choice. From a list of your amendments that describe your fundamental rights, you may pick **three** to keep. Think carefully before you vote, as all your rights as citizens will terminate except for the ones you select! Failure to make a decision will result in the termination of **all** rights.

**Remember:** You may only choose **three amendments to keep** from the list below. When deciding on the three most important amendments, keep in mind that rights they describe affect our lives on both a personal and societal level. Also some rights have a broader scope than others. Think about which rights might include other rights.

# Amendments

**First Amendment:**

Right to freedom of speech. Right to freedom of the press.  
Right to peacefully assemble.

**Second Amendment:**

Right to have a state militia and bear arms.

**Fourth Amendment:**

Right to privacy. Protection against unreasonable search and seizures.

**Fifth Amendment:**

Protection from self-incrimination.

**Sixth Amendment:**

Right to a lawyer and right to a jury.

**Eighth Amendment:**

Right to protection from cruel and unusual punishment.

**14th Amendment:**

Right to equal protection of the laws.

Using this table, rank the amendments in order of importance. For the top three, write down your reason for choosing these as the amendments you value most. For the bottom four, write down your reasons for why you think these are not as important.

Amendments	Why did you select these amendments as the most important?
1.	
2.	
3.	
Amendments	Why are these amendments less important to you?
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	