

A Visitor from Outer Space



Objective

Students will reach a deeper understanding of some important rights.



Resources

Student Handout: A Visitor from Outer Space
Attorney(s)



Procedures

- 1** Organize students into groups of four or five. Ask students to look at **Student Handout** (A Visitor from Outer Space). Read the opening paragraphs and then briefly review with students the meaning of each listed right. Ask students to define each right and help them explain the ones that are unfamiliar. Check for understanding, making sure that students understand the Bill of Rights protects them from violations by government organizations and people acting on the government's behalf. Private actors (companies, parents, individuals) are limited in different ways.
- 2** Have students select the five rights they want to preserve. (When they have agreed on five rights, they may join with another group to try to reach a larger consensus.)
- 3** List the ten rights from the handout on the board and poll the class on each group's selection.
- 4** You or the resource person should go through the list of rights with students, to learn what different groups thought. Constructively challenge the class and encourage students to appreciate alternate perspectives. You should ask students to support their choices and ideas with reasoned arguments.

Note: Students may argue that some of the rights imply others in an attempt to keep them all. (This is acceptable if they can make a good argument.) During the discussion you can ask students to reflect on what each right means today. Ask if the new rulers would have the same interpretation. For example, would the aliens understand the right to privacy in the same way we do?

- 5** As you go through the list of rights, ask students the consequences of keeping or losing particular rights. Help interpret the meaning of specific rights and comment on (or attempt to elicit from students) responsibilities that go with these rights. The introduction of challenging questions, new information, and/or relevant stories will help to keep students interested in the conversation.
- 6** Since all of the groups in the room will rarely agree, it can be constructive to have students talk to each other about their reasons. For example,

LESSON 3 (cont.)

why might two groups have voted to keep the right to bear arms, and three give it up? Prompt students to state their reasons so that the other groups understand them. If there is a classwide consensus, you or the resource person should play devil's advocate and argue the other side.

- 7 Ask students to create a list of individual responsibilities for each right they have chosen to keep.
- 8 Ask students how they would feel about aliens limiting their rights. Point out how the colonists felt just before the revolutionary war when Great Britain tried to control them after years of "non-interference." Discuss with students when it is important to "fight" for your rights. Be sure they consider both the potential costs and benefits.
- 9 Debrief students on the activity.

Note: A visiting lawyer can contribute to this lesson in several ways. He/she can lead a class discussion about the consequences that would result from having only the rights selected by the students. The lawyer could also react to the class decisions and express her or his choice of five rights. The lawyer can also help in interpreting the meaning of specific rights and comment on the list of responsibilities created by students.

There are certain responses and mistakes that are common among students doing the Visitor from Outer Space activity. Suggestions follow for dealing with these situations, if they should arise:

Right to keep and bear arms—Many fifth-graders choose not to keep this right. You may need to play devil's advocate and/or explain some of the history behind this right. Ask students: Why might the founders have considered this an important right? What controversies exist today over the meaning of this right? Does this right make people more or less safe?

Right to protection from cruel and unusual punishment—Students often become confused over this right, thinking that it applies to punishment by their peers or parents. It is important to link this to due process, explaining that the accused must be proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a criminal trial, then sentenced appropriately.

Right to freedom of press—Students may find the importance of this amendment difficult to understand. Help them to understand the alternative, in which the government controls the release and form of news. People would read only what the government wanted them to read. Alternatively, they may argue that this right is implicit in a right to free speech.

Right to a jury trial—Review the definition of jury—a group of people who have sworn to be fair and have been questioned by both the prosecution and the defense who also believe they will be fair. Help them to understand alternatives to jury trials and the reasons why the founders might have been leery of trials by judges.

Right to freedom of religion—Students frequently keep this right. Remind them that it means the government should remain neutral—neither encouraging nor discouraging religion. Even though many people came to America for religious freedom, they weren't always tolerant of other religions.

Right to peacefully assemble—This right is frequently dismissed. Like the right to freedom of the press, students may argue this right is included in the right to freedom of speech. As with all the others, historical context and consideration of alternatives may help students to understand why this right was included in the Bill of Rights. Remind them that if you can't get together, you'd have to say whatever you want in private.

Right to privacy—A right students often keep, but often misunderstand as a right to privacy from parents, siblings, etc. Be certain to emphasize that this right only protects individuals from unreasonable search and seizure by government representatives.

Protection from self-incrimination—Students are likely to need an explanation of the term self-incrimination; they may have a difficult time understanding why people should not be forced to admit to their wrongdoing. You may wish to have them imagine themselves being accused of a crime they did not commit and feeling forced to confess.

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STUDENT HANDOUT



It is the year 2026, and you are living a settled, prosperous life. You are quietly watching television with your family when a special news bulletin comes over the TV station. You immediately see that this is not the normal type of news bulletin because there is what looks like a very strange creature on the screen—the only thing which is familiar is that it is speaking in English. It tells you that it and its people have gained control over all of the communication networks in the United States and that everyone had better pay attention to what it has to say. You change the channel and, just as it said, there it is on every station. It begins to speak very loudly, and you gather your family around because you are beginning to worry about what it is going to do. Its speech is as follows:

My name is STHGIR and I am from the planet NOITUTITSNOC in another galaxy where the inhabitants are far superior to the beings on this planet EARTH. Just as we have gained control over the communications of the United States, we have the ability to take complete control over every one of your lives. We do not want a war between our planet and yours, but we do want to control some things so that we can live in peace and harmony with you. We have looked at some of your laws and the way your government operates and have found it to give too much freedom to the individual. Therefore, we are going to conduct a survey to try and arrive at a decision with which both you and we are happy. As I have said, we do not want to take everything away from you—but we can't allow you to continue to live as you have in the past. Therefore, I am giving you a list of rights which you have according to your Constitution. You are to look over the list and decide which of the rights are more important to you. We will allow you to keep FIVE of the rights. Choose five rights and be prepared to vote. If the vote is not unanimous (that is, if everyone doesn't agree), you will be given a short time to reach a unanimous decision. If you cannot, you will lose all of these freedoms.

- ☐ Right to keep and bear arms.
- ☐ Right to freedom of speech.
- ☐ Right to a lawyer.
- ☐ Right to protection from cruel and unusual punishment.
- ☐ Right to freedom of press.
- ☐ Right to a jury trial.
- ☐ Right to freedom of religion.
- ☐ Right to peacefully assemble.
- ☐ Right to privacy.
- ☐ Protection from self-incrimination.

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