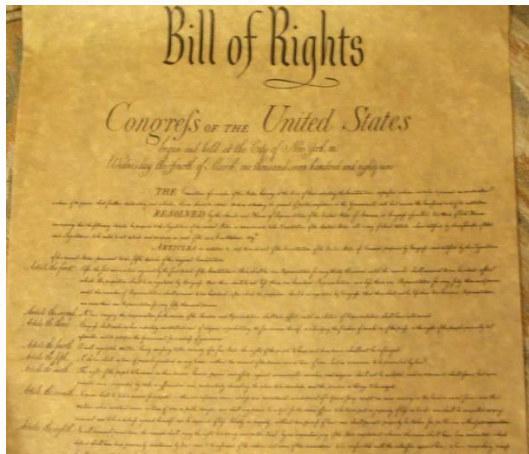


Primary Source Comprehension: The Bill of Rights

Grades 11.

Document Context:

The Bill of Rights was written after the Revolutionary War in 1791. It is the most important part of the Constitution, and it is considered the highest law in the United



States. Its purpose was to protect citizens of the United States and to ensure that the government does not infringe on the rights of the people. Several of the members of the first Congress wanted to ensure certain liberties and rights were protected.

The first ten amendments to the United States Constitution make up the Bill of Rights. James Madison wrote these ten amendments in response to calls from several states representatives for greater constitutional protection for individual liberties.

The Bill of Rights was strongly influenced by the Virginia Declaration of Rights written by George Mason. Other documents that influenced the Constitution include English documents such as the Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, the English Bill of Rights, and the Massachusetts Body of Liberties.

Bonus Watch YouTube video “The Bill of Rights: Pretty Important and Very Epic” by Kristina Edgar: https://youtu.be/QoeYhKcCW_Q

Exercise: Read the Bill of Rights. Open the topic for deeper discussion, on what each means and their significance historically, and relevancy today.

1. Discuss the meaning and importance of each of the rights guaranteed under the Bill of Rights and how each is secured (e.g., freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, petition, privacy).
2. How are they interpreted today versus when they were written?
3. Are these amendments still relevant today? Why or why not?
4. Do they apply to all citizens of the United States? Why or why not?
5. Do they need modification?
6. What amendment do you think may be missing?

7. How do these right become abused by people or the government?

Bonus Questions:

1. How many handwritten copies of the original Bill of Rights did George Washington have made?
2. On average, how long does it take to pass and ratify an amendment to the Constitution?
3. How many amendments did Madison originally have when he wrote the Bill of Rights?



The Bill of Rights

Amendment I.

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.

Amendment II.

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

Amendment III.

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.

Amendment IV.

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.

Amendment V.

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.

Amendment VI.

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.

Amendment VII.

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.

Amendment VIII.

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

Amendment IX.

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

Amendment X.

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.

