**Perseverance and the First Amendment**

**Category**

[First Amendment](http://constitutioncenter.org/education/educators/learning-resources/lesson-plans/perseverance-and-the-first-amendment)

**Grade Level**

[High School](http://constitutioncenter.org/education/educators/learning-resources/lesson-plans/perseverance-and-the-first-amendment), [Middle School](http://constitutioncenter.org/education/educators/learning-resources/lesson-plans/perseverance-and-the-first-amendment)

**SOURCE**

Lesson provided courtesy of [The Bill of Rights Institute](http://billofrightsinstitute.org/).

**DISCIPLINE**

American History, English/Language Arts

**STANDARDS**

V. What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

I.B. What are the rights of citizens?

**RECOMMENDED TIME**

One 90-minute class block or two 45-minute class periods. Additional time as needed for background and homework.

**OVERVIEW**

Students will be able to:

* write a one-page response defining “perseverance”;
* analyze the language of the First Amendment concerning the right to petition and assemble;
* research historical examples of groups or individuals exercising their right to petition and/or assemble, including but not limited to abolitionists, child labor movement, suffragists, Civil Rights movement, and pro-life/pro-choice groups;
* evaluate movements in light of an understanding of perseverance; and
* apply their understanding of perseverance to their own lives, causes.

**OBJECTIVES**

Students will be able to: · write a one-page response defining “perseverance”; · analyze the language of the First Amendment concerning the right to petition and assemble; · research historical examples of groups or individuals exercising their right to petition and/or assemble, including but not limited to abolitionists, child labor movement, suffragists, Civil Rights movement, and pro-life/pro-choice groups. · evaluate movements in light of an understanding of perseverance; and · apply their understanding of perseverance to their own lives, causes.

**MATERIALS**

* Focus Questions
* Student Handouts
  + Research Worksheet
  + Perseverance Quote

**PROCEDURE**

Background/Homework [10 – 15 minutes the day before]

Familiarize the students with the background and interpretation of the right to petition and assemble as protected by the First Amendment.

**First Amendment**

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.

* 1. Ask students what rights they think are covered by the First Amendment. You may want to start with a brief quiz on the First Amendment, seeing if they can name all five rights.
* 2. Review the language of the First Amendment, focusing on the phrase “Congress shall make no law…abridging the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”
* 3. Be sure to clarify the following about the right to assemble:
  + a. Historically, the right to assemble was included to make it possible to petition the government for redress of grievances;
  + b. Freedom to protest, demonstrate, parade has been drawn from freedom and speech and press, and the right peaceably to assemble;
  + c. In DeJonge v. Oregon, 299 U.S. 364 (1937), the Supreme Court:
    - called the right of peaceable assembly “cognate to those of free speech and free press and is equally fundamental…” ;
    - determined that holding peaceable political meetings cannot be proscribed
  + d. In order to be protected, the assembly must be peaceful and lawful.
  + e. Be sure to clarify the following about the right to petition:
    - The right to petition dates back to Magna Carta (1215);
    - The right to petition does not just mean a right of access to the court system; and
    - The right to petition has been interpreted to cover the right of citizens, groups, special interest groups, to make their views known to all parts of government, including the executive branch and its administrative agencies as well as the legislature;
  + 4. Ask the students, “Can you think of any groups that have exercised these rights in American history?” Have the students brainstorm a list and write the response on the board or overhead. Suggested groups or movements:
    - a. Abolitionists
    - b. Child labor movement (Mother Jones)
    - c. Suffragists
    - d. Civil Rights Movement
    - e. Pro-Life / Pro-Choice
    - f. World Bank/IMF
    - g. Environmentalists
  + 5. Divide the students into groups of 4-5 and assign each group one of the topics given.
  + 6. Distribute the research handout and review the directions. Each student should return to class the next day with the required information and sources. [Students will research the origins of each movement, summarize their causes, document the action(s) each group took to assemble and petition the government, over what length of time, and present information about the outcome of the effort.]

Teacher Note: You may want to take the time to review documentation of sources or note-taking techniques before proceeding with the remainder of the assignment.

Optional: Assign one or both of the historical narratives and accompanying questions.

**Warm-Up [15 – 20 minutes]**

Have students complete one of the following exercises at the beginning of class the day of the lesson or in addition to the homework the night before the lesson.

* + 1. Definition/Response. Provide the students with the following definition and ask the students to write a one-page response detailing a time they persevered in pursuit of a goal or objective, or in surviving a hardship, etc.
  + 2. Perseverance: n. the act or condition or instance of persevering AND Persevere: v. to persist in a state, enterprise, or undertaking in spite of counterinfluences, opposition, or discouragement
  + 3. Quotation/Response. Give students Perseverance Quotes. Ask them to choose one and write a response, focusing on their understanding of what it means to persevere and the value of persevering.

Using the provided focus questions, begin a discussion about perseverance and attempt to brainstorm a definition, listing class contributions on the board or overhead.<?p>

**In-Class Activity [45 – 50 minutes]**

Reassemble the assigned groups. Give students time to:

* + - 1. Compare their sources and information;
    - 2. Crosscheck and evaluate the validity of the information; and
    - 3. Fill in any missing gaps in the research.

Ask each group to think about the quality “perseverance” and deliberate: Does the group they researched exemplify this trait? Why or why not? Tell the students that they will be presenting briefly their findings to the class, being sure to include:

* + - Origins of the movement
    - Reason for petitioning the government and/or assembling
    - Reaction of the government
    - Time period and additional actions by the group
    - Outcome

Give each group 5 - 7 minutes to present their information and explain how the group “persevered” (or not), and whether or not the end result justified their perseverance.

**Wrap-Up [10 – 15 minutes]**

Have the class discuss the relative merits of each historical example of perseverance. Be sure to explore the line between “perseverance” and “obstinacy” as outlined in the focus questions. When is “enough enough”? Or is should an individual or group have a “never say die” mentality if the cause is “just” or “right”? Who determines the value of the cause – the individual or the government? Additional suggested questions:

* + - What do these groups have in common?
    - What type of goal(s) are they pursuing?
    - How does the government react?
    - Are the outcomes the same?
    - At what point, if any, should the groups have given up?
    - Should the government have the right to prevent them from expressing themselves?

**FOLLOW UP**

**Homework**

Ask the students to consider what type of cause or goal they could imagine going “above and beyond the call of duty” for. Under what circumstances would they be willing to persevere until the desired outcome is achieved? Have the students select a cause and complete one of the following suggested writing assignments:

Editorial: Write a 3-paragraph editorial advocating a position on a current political issue;

* + - 1. Letter: Write a one-page letter to your Congressmen, voicing your opinion about a current political issue;
    - 2. Essay: Write a one-page essay describing a time that you took part in a political rally or demonstration; or
    - 3. Script: Write a one-page dialogue between two people on different sides of a political issue.

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