



Water Bill of Rights

Project WET Curriculum and Activity Guide

Grade Level: Middle School, High School

Subject Areas: History, Government, Environmental Science

Duration: Preparation: 10 minutes; Activity time: 2- 50- minute periods

Objective:

Students will:

- Appreciate the value of the United States Bill of Rights in their lives
- Structure a Water Bill of Rights that ensures water of quality and quantity for all people.

Materials:

- Copies of the United States Bill of Rights

Making Connections

Students may have heard the term right of free speech and right to public trial. The right to use natural resources is often taken for granted. Because water is a resource in high demand, sometimes limitations are imposed through water rationing and water right policies. Developing a Water Bill of Rights helps students consider and debate what they perceive as their fundamental rights to availability and use of this resource.

Background

The American Bill of Rights was written out of concern for the individual, to ensure that in the quest for a government-controlled democracy, certain inalienable, or absolute, rights and freedoms would not be wrested from that individual.

In 1787, the American Constitution was awaiting ratification by at least nine of the 13 colonies. A number of states balked at ratification because the Constitution lacked a bill of rights to protect citizens against federal tyranny and to guarantee civil liberties. When John Hancock agreed to endorse ratification in Massachusetts, he proposed that nine amendments be added to protect citizens against such federal tyranny.

In an impassioned speech to the Virginia State Convention, Patrick Henry portrayed the new Constitution as dangerous to liberty. Under it, he claimed, the citizen would be abused, insulted, and tyrannized. "The Constitution reflects in the most degrading and mortifying manner on the virtue, integrity and wisdom of the state legislatures," he declared. "It assumed that the chosen few who go to



Congress will have more upright hearts, and more enlightened minds, than those who are members of individual legislatures.”

However, the Federalists, a political party that supported a strong federal government, resisted the addition of the Bill of Rights. They argued that most states already had their own bill of rights, and the Constitution prevented the government from interfering with states’ rights. Others argued that since the Constitution made the federal government superior to state rule, a Bill of Rights, protecting individual freedoms, was a crucial addition.

Thus, although the Constitution was ratified without amendments recognizing individual rights, such amendments were soon added. An understanding was reached that if the states would approve the Constitution, the First Congress would submit a series of amendments adding a bill of rights. Congress promptly proposed 12 amendments in 1789. Ten of these were ratified by the states and became part of the Constitution in 1791.

The First Amendment establishes the basic freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition. The Second and Third Amendments are concerned with the right to bear arms and the quartering of soldiers. Amendments Four through Eight prescribe just procedures in the treatment of persons accused of crimes. The Ninth and Tenth Amendments reaffirm the principle that the federal government possesses limited powers.

Other amendments have been added since the Bill of Rights was written. These amendments have helped the government solve special problems that have arisen as the nation has grown.

Around the world, people are beginning to recognize their right to a clean environment and to adequate resources (e.g., clean water). International meetings, such as the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), focus on national and individual rights related to a sustainable future and develop action plans to address these rights. Perhaps in the future, national and international bill of rights related to natural resources, including water, will become common.

Procedure

Warm up

Briefly review the United States Bill of Rights. Have students discuss or write a brief paper about what they think their lives might be like without these rights. Students can include an overview of all the rights or choose one or two to consider. Some students may have read George Orwell’s *1984*. Others may be familiar with *Lord of the Flies* (Golding), *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury), *Brave New World* (Huxley), or *Invisible Man* (Ellison). Passages from each of these books could be related to the discussion.



Ask students if they have ever considered their right to use water. Do students believe that a bill of rights related to water or other natural resources is necessary? What would be like if their rights to use water were restricted? Students might be familiar with water rights doctrines and water rationing policies that do regulate water use. Encourage students to express their personal expectations for water rights and privileges, both for themselves and for those in other parts of the country or world. List these suggestions on the blackboard or butcher paper.

The Activity

1. Inform students that they are going to draft their own Water Bill of Rights based on their personal expectations regarding access to and use of water.
2. Have students refer to the list generated in the Warm Up. Students can work in small groups or as a class to identify the most important suggestions, consolidate the list, and delete rhetorical or unnecessary items. Multiple viewpoints may result in heated discussions and debates. For example, is the proposed right practical? What if two rights contradict or challenge each other?
3. Encourage students to finalize ten rights for their bill. Students can use persuasive arguments and presentations to convince other students to support certain rights. Remind students that like the original Bill of Rights, the Water Bill of Rights must be acceptable to the majority of people. If necessary, take a class vote and select the ten most popular items.

A student generated Bill of Rights might include:

- The right to drink and use water without concern for health hazards.
- The right to live in a region or community that has citizen guidelines for water use and conservation and that enforces water laws and regulations.
- The right to an education that includes water awareness and citizen responsibilities.
- The right to compensation for damages to or destruction of water resources.
- The right to public forums in which citizens may express concerns about water resources.
- The right to a sense of personal power to address and correct water problems.

Wrap Up and Action

Discuss the process and outcome of the development of the rights. How do students feel about the need for a bill of rights related to water? What if some of the rights listed were taken away? Have students develop an action plan to ensure these rights are maintained.

Distribute the Water Bill of Rights to other classes, post it on bulletin boards, and contact local newspapers about printing it. Present the Water Bill of Rights to local, regional, national, or international conservation organizations (the Sierra Club, the National Association of Conservation Districts, the Wilderness Society, the National Farmers Union, the National Audubon Society, the Cousteau Society, etc.). Many of these organizations have programs and publications for young people.



Present the Water Bill of Rights to local water management authorities. This will provide water managers with an understanding of young people's expectations for water resources in the future. This will also give managers an opportunity to explain current water management practices within a historical context.

Students may want to send the Water Bill of Rights to congressional representatives (and the president), so that government leaders may understand the concerns of young people.

Assessment:

Have students:

- Describe what life would be like if a United States Bill of Rights did not exist (Warm up).
- Develop a Water Bill of Rights that addresses their expectations regarding the right to clean water supplies (step 3).
- Write a brief essay describing what should be done to secure individual rights related to water (Wrap up).

Extensions

To focus the attention of other students and teachers on the issue, collect headlines, articles, cartoons, and photographs (from newspapers and magazines) that deal with water quality problems. Create a hallway display by pasting these items on long piece of brown wrapping paper or newsprint.

Research water laws that attempt to address the national need for clean, ample water.

Attend a public meeting where formalized parliamentary procedures are practiced, to learn how people debate, vote or come to consensus on, and decide issues.

Resources:

American Journey: The Quest for Liberty Since 1865. 1992. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Bradbury, Ray. 1993. *Fahrenheit 451*. New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster.

Ellsion, Ralph, 1993. *Invisible Man*. New York,: Random House, Inc.

Golding, William, 1992. *Lord of the Flies*. Cutchogue, N.Y. Buccaneer Books, Inc.

Huxley, Aldous. 1991. *Brave New World*. San Bernardino, Calif: Vorgo Press.

Keating, Michael. 1990. *The Earth Summit's Agenda for Change: A Plain Language Version of Agenda 21 and Other Rio Agreements*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Youth Foundation.



Orwell, George. 1949. *1984*. New York, N.Y.: New American Library.

World Commission on Environment and Development. 1991. *Our Common Future*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.



United States Bill of Rights

Amendment 1

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 2

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 3

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 4

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 5

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 6

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 7

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 re-examined in any court of the United States, than according to the rules of common law.

Amendment 8

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

Amendment 9

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

Amendment 10

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.