

Equal Protection Under the Law



TEACHER'S GUIDE

Grades 7 to 12

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVE

This program will help students to understand the amendments that guarantee citizens of the United States equal protection.

CHAPTER 1. The Ninth & Tenth Amendment

Students will learn that the Ninth Amendment in the Bill of Rights states that the rights of citizens are not limited to those rights spelled out in the constitution. The program discusses that the Tenth Amendment was intended to maintain a balance of power between the federal and state governments. Students will come to realize that a system of government that divides power between federal and state governments is called federalism.

KEY VOCABULARY TERMS

Anti-Federalist

Articles of Confederation

Balance of Power

Confederation

Enumerated

Federalism

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the powers granted to the federal government enumerated in the constitution? (Declare war, regulate commerce between states, collect taxes)
2. Explain the differences between a confederation and a federation?
3. Why is the wording in the ninth amendment so vague? What was the intention of the ninth amendment? Explain.
4. In your own words, what is the intention of the tenth amendment?

ACTIVITY

Today, the ninth amendment bears directly on many of modern day constitutional issues. For example, United States Constitution does not specifically state that a citizen has a right to privacy, the right to die, gay marriage or the right to have an abortion. Choose one of these issues and research the various arguments for each side pro and con. Then, create a poster that promotes one side of the argument that you most agree with.

CHAPTER 2. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendment

The information provided in this chapter help students to understand the impact of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the constitution. The thirteenth abolished slavery. The fourteenth provided “equal protection” of the laws while the Fifteenth Amendment guaranteed all men the right to vote. The program also examines important cases that challenged those laws and the Supreme Court’s rulings on those cases through the years.

KEY VOCABULARY TERMS

Civil Rights Movement

Equal Protection of the Laws

Jim Crow

Segregation

Separate but Equal

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments referred to as the Reconstruction Amendments?
2. In your own words, explain what is meant by the phrase “equal protection of the laws” found in the fourteenth amendment.
3. What is the importance of the fifteenth amendment that gave men the right to vote regardless of “race, color, or previous conditions of servitude”?

ACTIVITIES

1. What Events Led to the Abolishment of Slavery in the United States?

Have students work in pairs to research and examine a legal document and a lithograph that explore life either before the Thirteenth Amendment. The team will write down and describe what the lithographs and documents tell them about that period of history and how it impacted the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment. Have each team present their findings about their documents to the class.

2. Reasons to Abolish Slavery

Tell your students that they are each work for a newspaper in 1863. Have each student will write an article or create a political cartoon that supports abolishment of slavery in America.

CHAPTER 3. Equal Protection and Extending Rights

This program examines how the Supreme Court refused to recognize the intention of the Fourteenth Amendment and the equal protection clause. Students will learn about the concept of “separate but equal” and about the Supreme Court decisions that ushered in the modern civil rights movement leading to the Equal Pay Act, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and others.

KEY VOCABULARY TERMS

Equal Protection of the Laws

Equal Protection Clause

Voting Rights Act

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. The 14th Amendment granted anyone born in the United States full citizenship and therefore the rights of all Americans. How did Jim Crow laws attempt to thwart that law?
2. Explain the doctrine of “separate but equal”.
3. How did Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren’s decision that “Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” impact the Civil Rights Movement?

ACTIVITIES

1. Jim Crow Laws

The purpose of this exercise is to have students understand the extent of Jim Crow laws and how they impacted society. Jim Crow laws were a series of local and state statutes designed to enforce segregation. Have your students break into small groups and research the different types of Jim Crow laws that existed. For example one of the Alabama laws stated that “no person or corporation shall require any white female nurse to nurse in wards or rooms in hospitals, either public or private, in which negro men are placed”. In Georgia there was a law that stated, “no colored barber shall serve as a barber to white women or girls. Have students research the penalties and punishments associated with people who violated Jim Crow laws.

2. The Fight for Equal Rights

Today, people are still fighting for equal protection of the laws. Have students research one equal protection issue that exist today (i.e. Women's rights, Gay rights, Americans with disabilities, and immigration rights). In a short essay, tell your students to explain the issue facing one of these groups and then offer suggestions as to how the federal government can help to protect the rights of the group.