

# AMERICA'S FIRST FREEDOM

A THEMATIC UNIT ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*"Each according to the dictates of his own conscience."*



**National Center for Religious Freedom Education**

Religious Freedom Institute  
Washington, DC

**SECOND EDITION**

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# UNDERSTANDING THE LESSON DESIGN

We are excited that you are using America's First Freedom Curriculum® (AFFC). Whether you use all or part of the 5-lesson unit, we believe this decision will allow you to expand your knowledge about this embattled human right, articulate and defend it in the public square, and take your rightful place as a free, equal, and responsible citizen. Please take a few minutes to review the below material so you understand the sections you will find in each chapter. Each of the five lessons follows a similar flow and contains the following elements:

## 1 INTRODUCTION

A brief introductory paragraph to the content begins each lesson. This section previews the important issues and basic principles that you will find in the lesson that follows.

## 2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The learning objectives can be used to help you understand the things your teacher will cover in class and expect you to know upon completion of the lesson. These are also valuable tools to help you know what you might find on the lesson quiz and other learning exercises. The lesson content, instructional design, and assessment strategies are aligned with these objectives.

## 3 KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

A list of key terms and concepts is included to help you identify important content you will encounter and assist you in understanding the content and preparing for the quizzes and other assignments.

## 4 LESSON CONTENT

Each lesson is designed to do much more than give you a list of things to memorize. If you are to become a champion of religious freedom, you need the ability to ask tough questions and make the answers your own. Since one of the goals of the AFFC is to provoke critical thinking, many of the activities contained in each lesson are designed to help you ask questions, evaluate the available evidence, and develop sound conclusions. To that end, each lesson contains the following features:

### ENGAGE

The *Engage* section is designed to stimulate your interest in and curiosity toward the upcoming lesson material. This section will ask questions and help you consider some of the big issues that will be covered in this lesson that follows.

**ENGAGE**

**Directions:** Read the following list of pairs. For each pair, determine which one seems, in your mind, to be a more important motivation for supporting religious freedom. Put a check in the appropriate box and then add up your total score by giving yourself 1 point for every check in column A and 2 points for every check in column B. Your teacher will explain your score to you.

✓	A	or	B	✓
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide for family		Assemble with others	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Follow my conscience		Human equality	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Free speech		Peaceful pluralism	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal and family safety		Charitable work	<input type="checkbox"/>

Give yourself 1 point for every check in column A.      Give yourself 2 points for every check in column B.

### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

The *Challenge Yourself* section allows you to deepen your understanding of the lesson content or explore a related area not directly addressed elsewhere in the lesson. This exercise will typically require you to exercise creativity and higher-level

**CHALLENGE YOURSELF**

**CIVIC VIRTUE AND HUMAN FLOURISHING**

Civic virtue is an important concept in political philosophy. It is understood to be a set of qualities, and resulting actions, that allow individuals to positively contribute to society. The belief is that when civic virtue wanes, political order and social cohesion is threatened. The concept has been much discussed throughout history. Ancient Greeks such as Socrates and Plato, Roman philosophers such as Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, and European philosophers and theologians including Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and Dante Alighieri typically identified 4 virtues. Others identified seven. Benjamin Franklin eventually settled on 13 in his pursuit of "moral perfection."

Read *Civic Virtue and Why It Matters* from the National Constitution Center and complete the following:

1. Identify your own list of 4-5 virtues that allow individuals to be good citizens and positively contribute to democracy, political stability, and community life.
2. Identify ways that organized religion can serve to promote each virtue in modern society.

thinking to complete. This section is not directly linked to the learning objectives, so your teacher may choose to use this section to deepen your understanding of the topic.

## REFLECT

The Reflect section engages you with authentic material that provides an opportunity to reinforce your understanding of one or more main points contained in the lesson content. In other words, this section will not just ask you to recall things you learned in the lesson but to apply them in a way that illustrates you understand what you studied.

**REFLECT**

According to a [2016 study](#), by the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation, religion contributes about \$1.2 trillion of socioeconomic value each year to the U.S. economy. That would make it the world's 15th largest national economy and larger than the global annual revenues of the world's top 10 tech companies (e.g. Amazon, Apple, Google, etc.). In addition to this economic impact, religion has a profound social impact. When people of faith are allowed to publicly contribute their time, efforts, and resources, they make significant contributions to the common good in areas such as health care, education, foster care and adoption, care for the poor, and disaster relief. Recently, Dr. Byron Johnson of the Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion has shared research that illustrates how faith-motivated individuals and organizations make significant contributions in less obvious ways including crime and delinquency, substance abuse treatment, and offender rehabilitation. In light of these facts, answer the following questions: (1) What if religious people were not allowed to express their faith in the public sphere and contribute to the common good according to the dictates of their faith? (2) How would the country be disadvantaged and who would have to make up for the lack of goods and services?

## 5 KEY QUESTIONS

The key questions are linked to the learning objectives at the beginning of the lesson and are included to deepen your understanding of the fundamental ideas contained in the lesson. The ability to answer these questions is an important part of preparing for the quizzes and other assignments your teacher may assign.

## 6 ADDITIONAL READING

The final section of each lesson is a list of additional readings that you may use to further explore the lesson content. These readings can also be a good source of material if your teacher assigns an additional essay or research paper. You will find additional learning resources such as videos and websites on the National Center for Religious Freedom Education website ([www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/affc](http://www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/affc)).

# AMERICA'S FIRST FREEDOM

## AN INTRODUCTION

On December 15, 1791, the new American states ratified the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution, known collectively as the Bill of Rights. The first of these amendments secures the right to religious freedom for every American and every religious community. The founding generation revered religion and the religious conscience, a reverence that was codified in the First Amendment guarantee of religious free exercise, and its ban on the federal government's establishment of an official religion. Their goal was to ensure the presence of religious ideas and actors in the public life of our country, as a source of the virtuous citizenry they believed necessary to succeed, and as a means of limiting the power of government. They believed that our Republic would fail without religious freedom.

Indeed, although this consensus was never complete, and religious freedom has never been perfectly applied in America's long history, that fundamental right has proven to be a valuable pillar of our success as a nation. Among other things, it has contributed mightily to the American "melting pot" of pluralism, drawing to our shores immigrants of every conceivable religion, ethnicity, and race. Each of these communities, from Jews and Catholics, to Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and others, has encountered resistance from some Americans at one time or another—people who were threatened by the "stranger," and who sought to expel from their midst those who were different. But in virtually every case, and sometimes amid violence and heroic sacrifice, immigrant communities have gradually been accepted as full and equal citizens in our nation. The American principles of religious liberty have been critical to their acceptance, to the freedom and equality which is guaranteed to each, and to our record as the most successful democracy in history.

Unfortunately, the consensus is eroding in contemporary America. The U.S. Constitution's guarantee of free exercise for every American, and every religion, is under attack from a growing array of those who oppose particular beliefs, or religion in general, in our public life. Some communities are suffering increased prejudice because of their respective religious identities. Attacks against Jews, Muslims and Sikhs because of their religious beliefs and practices are increasingly a tragic element of American life. Anti-religious secularists and others are arguing that the Founders were wrong—that religion in *public* life is bad for America. State legislatures are coercing religious colleges to abandon their beliefs. Small faith-based businesses are being given crippling fines, and even forced into bankruptcy. Applicants for jobs are being rejected because their religious beliefs are unpopular with prospective employers. Highly effective, well-established faith-based charities are being denied government grants that go to non-religious groups.

These and other assaults on religious freedom provide evidence that a long-established consensus on the meaning and value of religious freedom in American public life is in danger. This trend threatens the well-being of American democracy, and therefore of all of our citizens, whether they are religious or not. Religious freedom properly understood protects the right not to believe, and supports the common good in ways that benefit everyone, whatever their beliefs.

Outside of the U.S., people of faith from every corner of the world are increasingly victims of violence and persecution. In China, the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) carries out ruthless policies that persecute Uighur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners, and Christians. In Saudi Arabia, minorities (including Shia Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus) are forbidden to publicly express their religion unless it conforms to Saudi law. Anyone accused of dissent, blasphemy, or apostasy is subject to arrest, detention, and torture. In fact, the Pew Research Center recently reported that the vast majority (83%) of the world's population lives in countries with high or very high levels of religious restrictions.

How can the people of the United States and its government have any impact on the growth of religious intolerance, discrimination and persecution around the world? The answer is to begin at home, with those who share our lives—our families, friends, schoolmates, and members of our communities. In short, if we are to effect change around the world, we must start in America. In the America's First Freedom unit, we will learn why the Founders of this nation guaranteed the free exercise of religion for all of us. We should ask ourselves whether their reasons, and others that are provided in this unit, still make sense today. If they do, we should commit ourselves to defend free exercise of religion for everyone, everywhere.

Such a commitment presents a real challenge. It will not be easy to counter the growing hostility to religious freedom in America and around the world. It will take time and energy to convince government officials and our fellow citizens to defend free exercise of religion for everyone. But if we believe religious freedom is a basic human right, we have a responsibility to every person, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, or religion. We are entitled to free exercise of religion because we are human beings, members of the human family.

This unit explores the meaning and value of religious freedom, as well as the relationship between religious freedom and the other freedoms that we hold and cherish. It will help us learn the connections between religious freedom and other social goods, such as economic growth, political stability, and the decline of religion-related violence and terrorism. We must learn how to defend religious freedom for all people. We wish you the best as you explore this foundational topic about the human condition and its vital role in promoting human dignity, protecting human rights, and preserving the freedoms we cherish.

—*America's First Freedom Curriculum Staff*  
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