

Tolerance

Overview:

Rights have been an important part of American history since the ratification of the Constitution in 1789. The denial of civil rights because of race, gender, or religion reflects a larger intolerance of difference. Intolerance is also at the heart of much bullying behavior, and this lesson encourages students to contemplate the importance of rights and the role of tolerance in making sure that everyone has access to their rights. The principles behind creating rights to ensure fair treatment apply not only to history, but also to the school.

Materials:

- Print out handouts provided.

Handouts:

- [Tolerance](#)

Procedure:

1. Ask students what the word “rights” means to them. What kinds of rights have they heard of? Where do these rights come from?
2. Discuss the Bill of Rights and ask students to think about those, such as the First Amendment, that were designed to promote tolerance. Write the First Amendment on the board.

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.

3. Ask students what this means. Why did the Founding Fathers feel this was important? What kind of country were they trying to create with this amendment?
4. Did everybody enjoy these rights equally? (Here you can point of the persecution of the Mormons, the intolerance of Native American culture and religion, the fact that women and minorities were often not permitted to speak in public, the limitations on where and when minorities could assemble, the fact that slaves and women could not represent themselves in court, or examples of the violation of these rights previously covered in class or in current events.)

Tolerance

5. What perception of these groups kept them from exercising these rights?
6. What does “tolerance” mean?
7. How does tolerance help make sure that society is fair?
8. Ask students how they can encourage tolerance in their class or school.
9. In small groups, have students complete the “Tolerance” worksheet.
10. Have the small groups share their answers for question #3. What rights does everyone agree on?
11. Choose the rights that best represent the class, and assign each small group to make a poster or PowerPoint presentation illustrating why that right is important for learning.

Expanded Activity: Create a homework or brief research assignment in which students find examples of First Amendment violations and bring them to the class. Discuss why it is so hard to create a tolerant society.

This lesson is part of a regular feature in Josephson Institute’s [Character Educator blog](#).

Related websites:

- [Constitution of the United States](#).

McREL standards

Historical Understanding

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

Level II [Grade 5-6]

Benchmark 3. Understands that specific ideas have an impact on history

Knowledge/skill statements

1. Understands that an idea can have an impact on history
2. Knows an example of an idea that has had a significant impact on history

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>