
CHAPTER 2

INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

By Fredricka L. Stoller

The theme of individual freedoms has been selected for the second chapter of the Civic Education volume because it is pertinent, provocative, and of interest to students worldwide. While exploring a set of individual freedoms, students can learn the vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme. While improving their language skills, students can develop an understanding of the role of individual freedoms in civil societies and the complexities associated with such freedoms. In this chapter, students will examine a set of individual freedoms and evaluate situations in which those freedoms might have to be limited. Teachers can use the proposed lesson by itself or design a series of connected lessons that explore the theme in more detail. An even more elaborate thematic unit that examines each freedom in depth, from a variety of perspectives, could be developed and extended over a longer period of time. The lesson plan ideas presented here are meant to serve as a starting point for teachers interested in exploring the theme of individual freedoms with their students.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights lists many freedoms that should be granted to individuals around the world. Some examples of individual freedoms include the following: freedom of opinion and speech, freedom to give and receive information, freedom from discrimination, freedom from slavery, freedom from torture, freedom of religion, and freedom to organize meetings. In this chapter, we'll limit our exploration of individual freedoms by focusing on five different, though often overlapping, freedoms:

Freedom of speech: Freedom to say what you want; to express your opinion; to explore new ideas; to share different points of view

Freedom of press: Freedom to write what you want; to express your opinion in writing; to explore new ideas in writing; to share different points of view in writing; to criticize or support people and ideas in writing

Freedom of assembly: Freedom to meet in groups peacefully, in parks, in schools, on the streets, in restaurants, in private homes, and in other public and private places

Freedom of religion: Freedom to follow whatever religion you want; freedom to practice religious beliefs
Freedom of conscience: Freedom to decide what to believe

Together these freedoms represent the freedom of expression: Freedom to express oneself through speech, writing, art, clothing, hair (length, color, and style), music, religion, and so forth.

Although most civil societies endorse freedoms such as these, they do not do so without debate and controversy. Members of civil societies often engage in animated debates about the limits of different freedoms, including the boundaries of free speech and the limitations of freedom of expression. Debates center around questions such as these: Should people be allowed to tell lies in court? Should people be allowed to shout in libraries? Should people be able to ruin someone's reputation with an untrue newspaper report? Should a military officer be allowed to tell a newspaper reporter about secret military plans? Should controversial groups be allowed to hold a meeting in a public park or stage a march through a downtown area? Should controversial art be displayed in public museums? Should young people be able to wear whatever clothes they want to school? Should a religious group be allowed to recruit new members? Should a citizen be allowed to protest a new government law? The answers to such questions are complex and hardly straightforward.

Some governments limit individual freedoms with time, place, and manner restrictions. For example, they may govern when, where, and how an individual may speak but not what that individual may say. The challenge faced by such governments is in finding the proper balance between individual freedoms and the rights and interests of society at large.

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

The 50-minute lesson plan which follows highlights select issues related to the theme of this chapter: individual freedoms. Teachers are encouraged to adapt this lesson to the language and content learning needs of their students. Adjustments can easily be made so that the lesson matches the needs of low- or high-proficiency English language learners.

Preliminary Lesson Planning

Materials: For Activity 2, compile sets of three scenarios--highlighting issues related to individual freedoms--for each group of students. Choose from the scenarios listed in [Appendix A](#) or create scenarios of your own that highlight issues of concern to your students. Each scenario should depict a situation in which at least one individual freedom might need to be limited. Scenarios can be used with more than one group.

Student grouping decisions: Decide on procedures for grouping students for Activities 1 and 2; participants will remain in the same groups for both activities. It is recommended that groups have no more than six participants each. If appropriate, make up tentative lists of group members. Make last minute adjustments when it is determined which students are actually in class.

Vocabulary considerations: Consider the vocabulary that students need to know to complete the lesson successfully. Determine which vocabulary items the students already know and which items they will need to be introduced to. Some important terms, and their definitions, are included in a glossary in [Appendix B](#). Items listed in the glossary are written in **bold** print the first time they are mentioned in the lesson plan.

Warm Up Activity (5-10 minutes)

Purpose:

To stimulate student interest in the topic of individual freedoms
To draw upon students' background knowledge
To introduce vocabulary that will facilitate successful completion of the lesson

Procedures:

Write the following list of five freedoms on the blackboard:

Freedom of speech
Freedom of press
Freedom of assembly
Freedom of religion
Freedom of conscience

(If you do not think your students will understand this terminology, use key words from the definitions provided in the [Background Information](#) section of this chapter to explain their meanings.)

Ask students what comes to mind when they think about these freedoms. Write key words and phrases, from student responses, on the blackboard next to each freedom. (Once again, refer to the [Background Information](#) section for some possible key words and concepts.)

Ask students if they want to add other individual freedoms to the list on the blackboard. If students respond to your request, ask contributors to define the freedom for their classmates. Put key words on the blackboard.

Transition from Warm Up to Activity #1

Tell students that the class session will be devoted to exploring the individual freedoms listed on the blackboard.

Activity #1 (approximately 15-20 minutes)

Purpose:

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way
- To rank order individual freedoms and come to a group consensus on the importance of different freedoms
- To give students the chance to use key vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme of the lesson

Procedures:

Ask students to work individually to rank the freedoms listed on the blackboard from most important (1) to least important (5). (If students have expanded the original list of five freedoms to include new items, the number associated with the least important category will have to change so that one number can be assigned to each freedom on the blackboard.)

Remind students that there are no right or wrong answers. Circulate while students are completing their rankings to make sure everyone completes the assignment; help students who are having difficulties.

Assign students to groups. Ask groups to do the following:

- a. Discuss and compare rankings
- b. Explain reasons for ranking decisions
- c. Agree on a group ranking; come to a group consensus

Circulate in the classroom while student groups are working. For groups that have difficulties reaching a consensus, ask them to try to agree on only the most and least important freedoms. For groups that finish much earlier than other groups, ask them to identify the most controversial freedoms and to discuss the nature of the controversies.

Ask volunteers from each group to report on group decisions. Focus on those freedoms considered to be most important and least important. As each group reports to the class, record responses on the blackboard by putting a check plus (✓ +) next to the freedoms considered most important and a check minus (✓ -) next to the freedoms considered least important. If time permits, ask group members to provide a rationale for their decisions.

Do not erase the blackboard. Come back to it at the end of the lesson as a way to provide meaningful closure to the lesson.

Activity #2 (approximately 20 minutes)

Purpose:

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way
- To reinforce key vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme of the lesson
- To explore the intricacies of the freedoms listed on the blackboard

Procedures:

Ask students to think about the freedoms listed on the board. Should the freedoms ever be limited? When? Under what circumstances?

Ask students to consider the following situation: A teenager, in a movie theater, yells "fire" even though there is no fire.

- a. Should the teenager be allowed to yell, "fire"? Why? Why not?
- b. Which freedoms are being questioned here?

Ask students to work in their original groups. Give each group a set of three (or four) scenarios from [Appendix A](#). For each scenario, students should consider the following questions:

- a. Which freedom(s) is being questioned?
- b. Should the freedom be limited? Why? Why not?

As students are beginning to finish up their group discussions, ask each group to identify the most controversial scenario.

Ask a volunteer from each group to comment on the most controversial scenario to classmates from other groups.

Cool Down Activity (approximately 5 minutes)

Purpose:

- To provide some closure to lesson
- To give students an opportunity to discuss relevance of lesson

Procedures:

Remind students that, at the beginning of class, they identified certain freedoms as being more important than others are. Point to freedoms marked with a check plus (✓+) on the blackboard. Ask students if they still agree with their original decisions. Ask for comments.

If time permits, ask students to think about the class session on individual freedoms. Pose questions such as the following:

- a. What did you learn in class today?
- b. What differences in opinion did you hear today?
- c. Should some individual freedoms be limited? If so, under what conditions?

Possible Extensions to Lesson

1. Ask students any of these questions to extend the lesson.
 - a. Why is it important to protect freedom of expression: freedoms of speech, press, assembly, religion, and conscience?
 - b. Why are restrictions of freedoms based on time, place, and manner sometimes necessary?
 - c. How does the principle of "separation of church and state" relate to individual freedoms, in particular, freedom of religion?
 - d. What can a society do to find a proper balance between individual freedoms and the rights and interests of the larger society?
 - e. Why do you think so many nations have not been able to live up to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
2. Ask groups of students to write up new scenarios that highlight the discord between individual freedoms and societal interests. They can be asked to present the scenarios to their classmates, identify the freedom(s) involved, and explain possible restrictions.
3. Ask students to list (and then present) arguments in favor of and against an individual freedom.

[back to the top of chapter 2](#)

Appendix A

News Reports Handout

1. Consider the topics below and then answer these questions.

a. Which topics are most important for daily news **coverage**? Why? *Circle* the eight most important news topics. Be prepared to report your answers to other class members.

b. Should news sources (e.g., newspapers, magazines, radio, television) limit their reports about any of these topics? Why? *Underline* topics which might need to be restricted.

c. Should any topics be **banned**? Why? *Put a box* around topics that might need to be banned.

Science	Weather	Cultural events
Environment	<u>Natural disasters</u>	Social events
Crime	Sports	National <u>legislation</u>
Education	Business	National economy
Health	Wars and regional conflicts	National security
Famous people's private lives	News about the local community	New restaurants
Famous people's public lives	News about the country	Traffic
Government leaders	News about neighboring countries	Politics
Births and deaths	News about countries in other regions	

([Preliminary Lesson Planning](#)) ([back to Activity #2](#)) ([back to Possible Extensions to Lesson](#))

([back to Classroom Applications](#))