

CONSTITUTION DAY 2019

Discovery Education and iCivics Constitution Day Virtual Viewing Party

Every year on September 17th, students all across the United States commemorate Constitution Day by learning about the nation's founding document and framework for government. This year, Discovery Education and iCivics have teamed up to bring you Constitution Day 2019: Find Your Voice. This unique and virtual event will allow teachers and students to explore the [United States' Constitution](#), examine the rights the Constitution guarantees all Americans, and investigate ways today's students can participate in civic life.

Celebrate Constitution Day by joining a Virtual Viewing Party tailored to engage students to find their voices and know their rights. Politics and government can often seem like topics reserved for adults, and school-aged children may not realize that they too have a voice in American society.

Through participation in this Virtual Viewing Party, students will see examples of the rights the Constitution guarantees them, how those rights are protected, and how they can use those rights to make their voices heard.

During the Virtual Viewing Party, your students will these explore these concepts:

- You Have a Voice. Students will learn how their Constitutional rights give them a voice in American society.
- How Your Voice is Protected. Students will explore how their constitutional rights ensure their voices are protected.
- Make Your Voice Heard. Students will be encouraged to use their voices to take civic action and create positive changes for themselves and others.

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Special guests participating in this virtual viewing party:

- [Mary Beth Tinker](#), noted American free speech activist, will discuss her experiences fighting for her First Amendment rights and share with students how to make their voices heard.
- [Michael A. Brown, Esq.](#), a celebrated Baltimore, MD, attorney will share with participants how their right to free speech is protected by the Constitution.
- Zarea Boyde, a 12th grade student in the Law and Public Policy Academy at the Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Washington, DC, will share how she is advocating for positive social change in her community

Before the Viewing Party

Explain to students that this virtual viewing party will focus on their rights as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States of America. Use the following questions to see what students already know about this topic.

- What is a right? Who has rights?
- Can you name any rights you have? How do you know you have them?
- Why do rights need to be protected?
- What is a Constitution? What does it do?
- Why do we have a Constitution?
- How does the Constitution protect rights?

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During the Viewing Party

Use the strategy [Vocab Scavenger Hunt](#) to focus students on key concept words presented during the video.

- Guide individual students to divide a piece of paper into eight parts and cut them into separate cards.
- Ask them to write a vocabulary word or phrase on each card. Use these words: **right, amendment, speech, expression, activist, due process, advocate, and community action**. Students should then be directed to mix them up.
- In small groups of 3–4, have students discuss which words are familiar and share their understanding of the meanings.
- As a whole group, invite students to share and review the words and their meanings.
- Explain to students that, as they watch the viewing party, they will work with a partner to place the vocabulary words in the order they hear them.
- After the video segment concludes, challenge students to use the vocabulary words to summarize the main ideas presented

After the Viewing Party

ELEMENTARY — Freedom of Sketch

Freedom of speech includes the freedom to sketch and color! Hold a discussion circle with your students. Review what freedom of speech is with the class,

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explaining that “speech” comes in many different forms. It can be talking, but we also “speak” through writing, books, poems, photographs, and art. Use a painting or photograph to ask students what they think the piece is saying. What is the artist trying to express?

Reinforce the idea of freedom of expression by asking what they like to draw and what they like to read. Make a list. Engage students in a discussion. What if the government decided they didn’t like any of the things on our list? Imagine if a police officer came into the classroom and took down your art or took the book you were reading and threw it away. How would you feel? Explain censorship and that in America, we don’t have to worry about it because the Constitution protects our right to freedom of speech.

Challenge students to use their drawing skills to create an image, editorial cartoon, infographic, or comic strip showing how the Constitution protects freedom of speech. (You can suggest the Constitution be shown as a superhero or a shield defending rights or a weapon in the fight against censorship.) Invite students to present their work to the class. Hang up their work on a hallway bulletin board or in the classroom.

MIDDLE SCHOOL — Power of the Pen

Review what students learned in the video about what the Constitution protects. Explain that the Constitution not only protects rights but also gives people a voice in their government. Citizens can propose laws, urge their representatives to support or defeat a bill, and even try to add amendments to the Constitution. (Have students Google: “Gregory Watson and the 27th amendment” if time allows). Explain that their Representatives and Senators work for them, so it

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is their civic responsibility to let their Congresspeople know what issues they want supported.

Challenge students to brainstorm a list of current national issues that are important to them. Write the list on the board. Divide the class into groups, based on the topic they feel most passionate about. Within their groups, invite students to respectfully share and discuss their views on the topic they selected. If there are differing views, break them up into subgroups of students with the same view. Encourage each group to research and gather at least three facts, statistics, statements, or quotes that support their side of the issue.

Invite students to identify their three members of Congress (two [Senators](#) and one [Representative](#)) by visiting [Vote Smart](#). Encourage them to visit their Congress members' websites to retrieve their email addresses and review their views on particular issues.

Using a [sample letter](#) (this is a parent letter that can be adapted) or a [letter template](#), challenge each group to craft a letter urging their Congresspeople to support their side of an issue. Once completed, encourage students to share their letters with the class and also email them to their members of Congress. Keep track over the following weeks to see how many letters get a response.

HIGH SCHOOL — I Have a Voice

Ask students how the Constitution protects the freedom of speech and what the phrase, "freedom of speech" means to them. Explain that it includes freely giving one's opinions, including those that criticize the government and its actions (or inactions).

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Invite students to brainstorm a list of current issues, laws, events, or controversies they feel their government should address—this can be at the local, state, or federal levels. Prompt them to choose an issue by asking, *If you had a chance to speak before a large audience, your town, the Governor or the President, what would you want to say?* Challenge them to express their view on the issue in an entertaining yet thought-provoking way. Formats to consider: a poem, rap, short story, song, artwork, video storyboard, skit, political satire monologue, children’s book, PSA, editorial, vlog/blog, speech, t-shirt message & design, political cartoon, etc.

Students should first decide which issue to address and if they want to focus on it broadly (ex: income inequality) or a specific aspect of it (ex: minimum wage). Encourage students to research facts, statistics, and opinions on the issue to help determine and inform what message they want to express. They then should decide which format they want to use. Students can work alone or in pairs and can share their final products to the whole class or in small groups.

Need help deciding on an issue? Consider these prompts:

- What do you see in your school/community that needs to be improved?
- What issues are discussed most in your home? (money, education, work, safety, etc.)
- What are your interests outside of school? Are there any larger issues or concerns in that area?
- Where do you feel your voice is least heard? What do you want to say?

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Take Action Ideas

After viewing the clips, students may be looking for concrete ways they can take action. Here are some ideas to ignite action in your school or community.

- If you're old enough and eligible, register to vote! If not, ask those who are if they're registered to vote (and if they're not, encourage them to register!).
- Research when your local government (ex: City Council, County Commission) has meetings that are open to the public. Attend a meeting!
- Find out who your representatives are by visiting votesmart.org and typing in your zip code. Then send one of them an email or letter—or better yet, call their office—to voice your opinion on a particular issue that is important to you.
- Create a class or personal social media campaign through Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram that will inform people about the importance of paying attention, engaging in civil discussions, voting, etc.
- Volunteer to participate in or host a debate-viewing party.
- Write a letter to your local newspaper voicing your opinion on a local issue or responding to a local news story.
- Start listening. Keep an ear out for conversations about your community and learn about what is happening and who is acting.