

FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

RESOURCE TOOLKIT FOR AMERICAN SPACES

This Resource Toolkit is designed for programming at American Spaces to create a greater awareness of the rights outlined in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, specifically freedom of religion. This is the second in a series of three First Amendment Toolkits.



LESSON PLANS

Religious Tolerance - This interactive lesson from the Southern Poverty Law Center promotes religious tolerance.

Respect of Religion - This PBS lesson plan has videos and describes various religions and the importance of mutual respect. It is appropriate for intermediate English language learners.

Religion and U.S. History - These more advanced PBS lesson plans explore the history of the United States and the role of freedom of religion.

Separation between Church and State - This lesson plan from Interactive Constitution has videos, lesson plans, and activities.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE U.S.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...

Today this means that there is no official state religion. There are about 3,000 religious groups in the United States. James Madison, known as the Father of the Constitution and 4th president, argued that everyone should be able to choose their own religion, and this right is enshrined in our Constitution under the First Amendment.

In 1998, Congress passed the **International Religious Freedom Act** to ensure that the U.S. government promotes this fundamental right. This law was later amended to include the freedom of conscious to protect the right not to profess or practice any religion. Under this act, Congress receives an annual report known as the International Religious Freedom Report that details the status of religious freedom throughout the world. Annual reports can be found [here](#).



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of STATE
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

RESOURCES

Articles from ShareAmerica

- [Why Religious Freedom Matters to Americans -](#)
- [Right to Religious Freedom](#)
- [Support religious freedom end blasphemy laws](#)

Voices of Religious Freedom

- [A Monk's Story](#)
- [A Holocaust Survivor](#)
- [Tortured for Her Faith](#)
- [Right to Religious Freedom](#)
- [Uighur Persecution](#)
- [Attacked for Having no Faith](#)

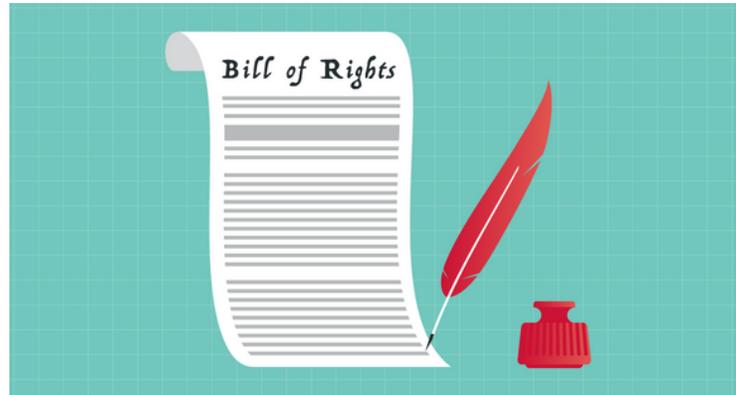
ShareAmerica's Expert Advice Series

This series is designed for those learning English.

- [Legal and Moral Obligations to Protecting Human Rights -](#)
- [Protecting Human Rights to Benefit All](#)
- [Ensuring Human Rights of All](#)

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

"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."



Important Dates

While you should consider running events on this throughout the year in coordination with Public Affairs Section campaigns, here are some key dates:

- **January 16** - National Religious Freedom Day
- **August 22** - International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief

MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

- **Library of Congress** - [This exhibition](#) explores religion and the founding of America
- **USA Pavilion at Expo 2020: Thomas Jefferson's Quran**
- **Smithsonian National Museum of American History** This exhibition explores religion in early America
- **National Museum of American Religion** - Here's a historical [timeline on the history of religious freedom in America](#)

PROGRAMMING IDEAS

- Invite activists, exchange alumni, and religious leaders to discuss the importance of pluralism and religious freedom in your local context.
- Invite U.S. officials to discuss how the U.S. promotes religious freedom abroad.
- Use the Expert Advice Series for English discussion clubs or courses
- Create presentations or discussions on this topic using the lesson plans and videos in this kit
- Check out Gale in Context from [eLibraryUSA](#) for more resources.