

# **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: WE AREN'T THERE YET**

**NEH LANDMARKS IN AMERICAN HISTORY LESSON PLAN**

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**Overview of Lesson:**

The purpose of this lesson is to provide students with an opportunity to expand the knowledge of current world events that are having an impact on religious freedom. Students will be assigned a current world situation/event from the First Freedom Center's list of top events relating to religious freedom or their list of issues of religious freedom. Students will research the event/situation and prepare a product that will reflect their understanding of: the basic facts/history of the event or situation; the reason(s) this event is either endangering or expanding religious freedom; how citizens can help promote or protect religious freedom.

**Target grade level: 8<sup>th</sup> Grade**

**Suggested time needed: 2-3 class periods (40 minute periods)**

**Objectives:**

- Students will research a current world event/situation that is having an impact on religious freedom.
- Students will paraphrase as they practice note-taking skills.
- Students will convert their notes into either a letter to the editor or a script for a television interview of an "expert" on their assigned situation or event. The letter or script will demonstrate that the student has gained an understanding of the basic facts/history of the situation and how it is impacting religious freedom in the world today and what organized efforts exist today to deal with the issue. The students will also include in the letter/script their own opinion/ideas on what citizens can do to protect/expand religious freedom.
- Students will share their final product with their classmates and demonstrate proper presentation and listening skills during the sharing sessions.

**Materials:**

- Copy of First Freedom Center's ad for National Religious Freedom Day (or computer with LCD)
- List of the First Freedom Center's events that relate to religious freedom- put on a transparency. (See attached)
- Overhead projector and screen
- Computers with Internet access
- Assignment sheet/rubric/(see attached)
- Teacher-made interview script sample and a "letter to the editor example from a recent newspaper
- Paper, pencil or pen for note taking and for writing the script or letter

### Activities/procedures

This lesson will fit in at the point where 8<sup>th</sup> graders are studying freedom of religion. This could be during a unit on the founding of the colonies, a unit on the Bill of Rights, a lesson on a current event relating to religious issues, or on Jan. 16<sup>th</sup>- National Religious Freedom Day.

The teacher will introduce the lesson by reading students excerpts from the First Freedom Center website that relate to National Religious Freedom Day. If possible, the teacher will obtain a copy of the ads that are run in newspapers on Jan. 16<sup>th</sup> in honor of the special day. (See First Freedom Center website)

While displaying the ad, the teacher will read the information from the ad to the class and generate discussion with these comments and questions:

“The First Freedom Center is an organization in Virginia that is dedicated to promoting freedom of religion as a fundamental, inalienable human right and educating the citizens of the United States and the world regarding the importance of religious freedom. Why is religious freedom so important? What are some examples of places you have seen in the news where religious freedom does not exist? How do humans suffer when they live without religious freedom?”

(Teacher may prompt for responses by asking students to think of the situation of many women and girls in the world, of the various marriage customs that exist, various cruel punishments they have read about, etc.)

Teacher will present the students with a written description of the assignment, including a rubric and a simple sample product. (See attached)

Using an overhead and transparency, teacher will project a list of topics that are the research options and students will either select an event or situation of their choice or be assigned one by the teacher.

Students will move to computers and begin their research. Student progress will be monitored as the teacher supervises and assists students. Once the student and teacher agree that the student has adequately researched and taken notes on the assigned topic, students will be allowed to move to the next stage of the assignment: writing a script or letter to the editor. Final products will be due at the beginning of the third day of this activity.

On the third day of this activity, the students will share their letters/scripts with the class. Letters will be read aloud to the class by the author or a designated reader and the author and a partner of his/her choice will perform scripts. The written products will be collected by the teacher for assessing/grading following the rubric guidelines.

Discussion, led by teacher, will follow each presentation. As the discussions proceed, teacher will keep a running list of the ideas that come forth for ways to defend/expand religious freedom. This list will stay posted in the classroom and be

referred back to throughout the year as the topic again surfaces in other units or during current events discussions.

**Extension or enrichment activities:**

Talented and gifted students or those wishing to go beyond the assignment requirements could expand their research on the topic and write an essay to submit to the First Freedom Center. Another option would be for these students to polish their letters to the editor and actually submit them to a local newspaper.

**Interdisciplinary Connections:**

English, reading, communication, speech, current events, political science, geography, world history

**Internet Sources:**

First Freedom Center website: <http://www.firstfreedom.org/index.html>

**Academic Content Standards covered:**

- Students will demonstrate research skills using the Internet.
- Students will read non-fiction material for meaning.
- Students will demonstrate note taking and paraphrasing skills.
- Students will write meaningful sentences and paragraphs using proper grammar, punctuation, spelling and organization of ideas.
- Students will demonstrate public speaking skills.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of current world events and relate these events to their prior knowledge of our country's past.
- Students will demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of basic rights guaranteed to citizens of the United States.
- Students will participate in class discussion and demonstrate behavior associated with good listening.
- Students will analyze and hypothesize about a variety of situations.

## ATTACHMENTS:

### 1) LISTS OF EVENTS/ISSUES FROM FIRST FREEDOM CENTER WEBSITE

<http://www.firstfreedom.org/news/documents/Top%2010.pdf>

AND

<http://www.firstfreedom.org/religiousfree/issues.html>

### 2) STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS/RUBRIC/SAMPLE

#### “FREEDOM OF RELIGION: WE’RE NOT THERE YET”

You will be assigned an event or situation to research. The event or situation is one that is related in some way to freedom of religion. You will have approximately the equivalent of one 40-minute class period to do your research and take notes. As you research you should be focusing on finding the answers to these questions:

- a. What are the facts about this situation?
- b. Where is it happening?
- c. Who is involved?
- d. What is happening?
- e. Why is it happening?
- f. What are the different points of view related to this event?
- g. In what way is this situation hurting or helping people?
- h. What can citizens of the world do to try to stop the situation if it is hurtful or what can they do to continue to support it if it is a positive situation?

Once you have the answers to the above questions, you will be taking that information and presenting it in **ONE** of these two ways:

1. You will take on the role of someone who is very concerned about the situation you researched. You will write a letter to the editor of a newspaper expressing your concerns.

OR

2. You will take on the role of a television interviewer who is interviewing someone who is actually living the event you researched. Your script will include the lines/questions of the interviewer and the lines of the person being interviewed.
3. You will be presenting your letter/interview to the class on \_\_\_\_\_, the day that the project is due.

#### RUBRIC FOR BOTH OPTIONS:

Product turned in, complete and on time: 2 points

Product will include the answers to the questions b-h listed above: 2 pts. each (14)

Correct use of spelling, grammar, punctuation: 4 pts.

Total points: 20 pts.

(Teacher may award extra points for products that exceed the minimum expectations)