



## 45 Words: The Story of the First Amendment

The First Amendment is a fundamental law. But how well is it understood? Register (for free) at the Newseum's Digital Classroom website. Watch the video, "[45 Words: The Story of the First Amendment](#)," which is used in the news and First Amendment museum.

### Discussion at three levels:

**Flashlight:** High schools are supposed to use [Constitution Day](#) each year to learn about the nation's basic laws, including the First Amendment. Does your high school observe Constitution Day? Federal law requires them to do so. Do you think Americans in general know the Constitution? What parts do you think are most misunderstood?

**Spotlight:** After reading [this Illinois First Amendment Center piece](#): Why did the founders think freedom of the press was so important? Was it a reaction to the way the British government treated press rights? Did "the press" mean something different in 1791 than it does now? What sort of protection did the founders intend to provide for the press (complete and unfettered or with certain exceptions)?

**Searchlight:** Pull key questions of First Amendment from the [2011 Future of the First Amendment report](#). Using simple voting software like [PollEverywhere.com](#), have a class discussion with students voting anonymously on their phones as you discuss each question.

**Extra credit:** You often hear that the First Amendment was placed first in the Bill of Rights because it is the most important. Certainly, free speech is the foundation of a free society. But in the Bill of Rights that was sent to the states to be ratified, the First Amendment was not first — it was third, and only became the first because Nos. 1 and 2 were not ratified. What did the original amendments one and two propose to do? Were those personal rights? Do you think the states were right to reject them?