

THE BIRTH OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Growing Informed Citizens Lesson Plans

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PART 1: RESEARCH, WRITE, REPORT

READ: *The Birth of The First Amendment*, by Donna Griffin and Gary Varvel

Discussion questions:

1. How has the role of journalists changed since Zenger's time?
2. How did journalists of color and women make a difference with their reporting and writing?
3. How has the definition of libel changed?
4. What are the Five Freedoms of the First Amendment? Pick an example from the book how one individual took a stand for a First Amendment Freedom.
5. What does the Watchdog Role of the media mean to you?
6. What does it mean for journalistic media to be called "The Fourth Estate"? How is the press integrated in the checks and balances system of American government?

BE A WATCHDOG!

TIPS:

1. Observe Find out the 5 W's and the H (Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How)
2. Come up with questions for sources and all those involved
3. Listen to what these people have to say
4. Write your story based on the facts and what others say - keep your opinion out of the story. Ask, "Who said? - If the answer is you, take it out.
5. Trust your gut. How will events and issues impact you and your community?

ASSIGNMENT: Choose an issue or event at your school. Interview at least three people who are primary sources and write a 100-200 word story that answers the 5 W's and the H and has at least three direct quotes.

[Story Construction Sheet](#)

[Media Creation Story Rubric](#)

WATCHDOG JOURNALISTS ARE ALL AROUND

Zenger and those who wrote the stories for The New York Journal were the first watchdog reporters. They told the truth about Gov. Cosby and his corrupt actions.

Watchdog reporters are also called muckrakers, a term that came from then President Teddy Roosevelt. He meant the term in a negative way, but journalists took the name as a badge of honor. A muckraker goes to where problems are and shines a light on the facts and how people are impacted. Muckrakers' work over the years forced most of the major changes in the government during the 20th century.

ASSIGNMENT: Choose one of the five journalists from *The Birth of The First Amendment*.

1. Research the journalist further and read their work.
2. Answer the following questions:
 - How did they find information before the days before radio, TV, computers and smartphones?
 - Write down one important fact they uncovered and share it with your class.
 - Who are the reporters making a difference at your school and community?
 - Find an example today in your local community of a journalist who exposed a problem or covered an issue or event that caused change in your area - show how the journalist followed journalistic principles in covering the story today.

Part 2: The SPEAK THE TRUTH ZOOM EVENT

GET READY:

- Schedule your virtual event with Griffin Media
donna.griffin@griffinmediaandpublishing.com (Thanks to a grant, we have 1 more free event for those who sign up by Nov. 15.)
- Choose a diverse group of people to participate in your event. Griffin Media will share the Zoom link two weeks before your chosen date
- Griffin Media will bring everyone together for a virtual 40-min Speak The Truth Town Hall to discuss the following questions:

What is a journalist's role in protecting the First Amendment?

How relevant is that role today in the midst of a pandemic, protests, and an upcoming election?

Discussion questions: How do you recognize a journalist? How do you know something is true vs. false? Is fact vs. opinion? How do you know the difference? Where do you go to get information?

PART 3: CREATE MEDIA THAT MATTERS

Send Griffin Media your coverage via a Shared Google Drive folder and we will help you create a media report on your Speak The Truth discussion story, pictures, video that could be shared with your local professional media.

FIND OUT MORE:

NELLY BLY: <https://thegrandarchive.wordpress.com/behind-asylum-bars/>

"We do not ask you to go there for the purpose of making sensational revelations. **Write up things as you find them, good or bad; give praise or blame as you think best, and the truth all the time.** But I am afraid of that chronic smile of yours," said the editor. "I will smile no more," I said, and I went away to execute my delicate and, as I found out, difficult mission. - Nelly Bly, The New York World, October 9, 1887

<http://www.historicjournalism.com/nellie-bly.html>

IDA B. WELLS:

On the response to rioting in Springfield, Illinois in 1908; at this time Wells was living in Chicago and teaching Sunday school in her Presbyterian church.

“I do not remember what the lesson was about that Sunday, but when I came to myself I found I had given vent to a passionate denunciation of the apathy of our people over this terrible thing. I told those young men that we should be stirring ourselves to see what could be done. When one of them asked, "What can we do about it?" I replied that they could at least get together and ask themselves that question. **The fact that nobody seemed worried was as terrible a thing as the riot itself.**”

- *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster [daughter of Ida B. Wells] pp. 299-300

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/aarwellsexrpt.htm>

In 2020, the Pulitzer Prize Board posthumously awarded a Special Citation to Ida B. Wells “for her **outstanding and courageous reporting on the horrific and vicious violence against African Americans** during the era of lynching.” The citation comes with a bequest by the Pulitzer Prize board of at least \$50,000 in support of her mission.

<https://idabwellssociety.org/about/our-namesake/>

Upton Sinclair: The Jungle, 1906

“This is no fairy story and no joke; the meat would be shoveled into carts, and the man who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one - there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit.”

<https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/excerpt-from-the-jungle>

Edward R. Murrow

Response to Senator Joe McCarthy on CBS' See It Now, April 13, 1954

“I believed 20 years ago and I believe today that mature Americans can engage in conversation and controversy, the clash of ideas, with Communists anywhere in the world without becoming contaminated or converted. **I believe that our faith, our conviction, our determination are stronger than theirs, and that we can compete -- and successfully, not only in the area of bombs but in the area of ideas.**”

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/edwardrmurrowtomccarthy.htm>

Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein

Pulitzer Prize Winning Reporters, The Washington Post

“Because the media is so focused on what’s next, they are going to miss a giant story,” Woodward said. “**Right now it is all about manufacturing controversy and name-calling**, which is easy to do in the highly politicized partisan atmosphere we have today; it masks the real complex issues.” - *Bob Woodward, Nov. 1, 2012, Indianapolis, IN*

<https://birthofthefirstamendment.org/meeting-woodward-berstein/>

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