

Middle School (6–8)

How to use this: Pick the format you'd most enjoy running and choose any lesson under it. Not sure? The ★ marks the easiest lesson to run in each format — take it and go. Everything here is built for 6–8 and needs nothing beyond standard classroom AV. Each notes the core ideas it teaches — aim to land at least two in your visit. *Watch the grade tags — a few options are upper middle school (grade 8) only.*

Story-driven discussion

Dig into a case or a right they feel.

★ **Rights and Responsibilities (4–6, WA Courts)**. What we owe one another, and why fair rules matter — students act as judge on a real historical case (blindness from a firecracker, an infected kick, a baseball injury) and reach their own verdict before hearing the real one. Presenter note: for a shorter visit, assign one case to the whole class rather than running all three. *Core ideas: The rule of law, We the People.*

An Introduction to the Bill of Rights (4–8, WA Courts). Story-driven — share real First or Fourth Amendment cases and ask students what life would be like without that right. Presenter note: before your visit, confirm whether the teacher has already covered the Bill of Rights. Bring 2–3 case stories ready to tell and check which handout the teacher wants used (included with the lesson PDF). If they haven't covered the Bill of Rights yet — focus on the First and Fourth Amendments and introduce them yourself. *Core ideas: Rights and liberties, Civic agency.*

Fourteenth Amendment – Brown v. The Board of Education Lesson (3–6, American Constitution Society). Tells the true story of Linda Brown's fight to desegregate her neighborhood school. Presenter note: skip the closing discussion questions about present-day school segregation. Focus: on “what does equal mean to you?” questions. *Core ideas: Equality and fairness, The rule of law.* [Note: Page opens with ACS's advocacy mission — this is not part of the lesson.]

Talk through a big idea

Students pick a side and make the case.

★ **First Amendment — Freedom of Speech (Tinker v. Des Moines) (6–8, American Constitution Society)**. The armband-protest case that defined student speech rights, plus a class debate exercise where students argue whether pajamas, a petition, and a protest song count as protected speech. Use the “First Amendment Quiz” as a quick oral warm-up instead of printing it. Skip: VerifyIt trivia icebreaker. *Core ideas: Rights and liberties, The rule of law.*

• **Understanding Procedural Justice (4–7, WA Courts)**. Why a fair process matters as much as the verdict — connects directly to how students experience fairness in their own lives. *Core ideas: The rule of law, Equality and fairness.*

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Drug Testing in Schools: Take a Stand (8-12, WA Courts). Students physically take a position on a school-relevant issue and defend their position. Read the case-law section before your visit — it covers five real cases and a subtle state-vs-federal distinction worth getting right. Presenter note: for a shorter visit, focus on Washington's own case (*York v. Wahkiakum*) rather than covering all five. *Core ideas: Rights and liberties, The rule of law.*

Run a mock trial

Students take the courtroom roles; you're the judge.

★ **Theft Scripted Mock Trial (6-12, WA Courts).** Full criminal case, prosecution vs. defense, argued start to finish. The legal teams are split into six small roles apiece, so with 18 speaking parts in play, no one student is stuck carrying a big block of lines. It's written for the whole 50-minute period, though: plan to trim testimony or tighten the closings to fit inside the ~20-minute activity window. *Core ideas: The rule of law, Equality and fairness.*

The Fourth Amendment Goes to the Mall (6-8, American Constitution Society). A courtroom argument, not a script: split the class into prosecutors, defense, and judges arguing whether a mall security guard violated a suspect's Fourth Amendment rights. You'll need to teach "state action," "search," and "reasonable expectation of privacy" before the arguments have anything to stand on, using the Fundamentals section earlier in the packet. Read six real-case squibs ahead of time to help students argue. *Core ideas: Rights and liberties, The rule of law.*

Play a game

Fast and competitive; good energy in the room.

Rules, Rules, Rules Lesson (6-8, American Bar Association). "Pass the Eraser" game makes students feel, firsthand, why clear and consistent rules matter before you ever say the words "rule of law." Rules change without warning, then students rebuild and vote in their own. Discuss after: Why do families, schools, and communities need rules? Who steps in when people disagree about what a rule means or whether it's being followed fairly? *Core ideas: The rule of law, We the People.*

Solve a problem or build something

Hands-on reasoning and invention.

★ **Conflict Resolution (6-12, WA Courts).** Students work through a real dispute via video and paired negotiation, then map it onto the four ways conflicts get resolved — negotiation, mediation, arbitration, litigation. Will need the teacher's help mid-activity to distribute alternating viewpoint handouts and pair students, plus a cued-up video ahead of time. *Core ideas: The rule of law, Equality and fairness.*

The Courts: Interpreting the Law on Weapons (5-12, WA Courts). A short judicial-reasoning exercise — students apply a written law to messy real-world facts and see why interpretation is the court’s job. *Core ideas: The rule of law, Checks and balances.*

No Vehicles in the Park (5-12, WA Courts). The classic “what does the rule actually mean?” puzzle — students wrestle with an ambiguous law the way a court does. Assumes students already have a basic grounding in how laws are made and interpreted — confirm with the teacher beforehand. For a first-time, shorter visit, pick 4-5 (out of 8) scenarios rather than rushing through all of them. *Core ideas: The rule of law, Checks and balances.*

Video clips to breakup your lesson

A quick drop-in to help anchor the discussion. Match the clip to your grade.

- **Teach with TVW clip (6-12):** Anchor to a discussion and connect it to your own job. (5-7 min)
 - **Facts of Congress – The Bill of Rights (4-6).**
 - **WA TVW – Civics 101: What is the Law? (6-12).**
 - **TED-Ed – Why wasn’t the Bill of Rights originally in the US Constitution? (6-12).**
 - **C-SPAN – Constitution Clips (6-12).**
 - **iCivics/Center for Civic Education – Constitution EXPLAINED, 35 short videos (6-12).**
 - **PBS – The Constitution’s origins: “The Big Bang Theory” (6-12).** Constitutional scholar makes the case for the founding as the pivotal moment in American history — a good scene-setter before diving into rights or structure. (4 min)
 - **PBS – Philadelphia and the Constitutional Convention (6-12).** Historian walks through the practical, thorny problems the framers had to solve to get 13 states to agree on anything — useful before an activity on compromise, federalism, or how the branches were designed to check each other. (6 min)
 - **National Constitution Center – Constitution 101 (9-12).** In partnership with Khan Academy, this complement to the teacher-led version, offers students short videos that span nine engaging units that delve into constitutional concepts.
 - **National Constitution Center – Creating the Constitution (all ages).** Describes the Constitutional Convention — 55 delegates, 3½ months of compromise, landing on three branches and checks and balances. Notes the document’s imperfections and how “We the People” has been tested ever since.
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Going deeper – national supplements

Not for a single visit — pull one targeted piece or use these to brush up before you go.

- **National Archives – Teaching Six Big Ideas in the Constitution (8-12)** – Five-step unit; best standalone lesson is Step 5, six balanced two-sided debates on limited government, federalism, checks and balances.
 - **Annenberg Classroom – Teaching the Constitution (9-12)** – Use this guide to find videos, lesson plans and games that connect to the articles and amendments in the Constitution.
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