

Children's Literature and the Bill of Rights
by John F. Mueller

Each of the books included in this unit may be used separately or together to teach concepts of authority, responsibility, rulemaking, justice, diversity, freedom, etc. Many may directly relate to constitutional issues like privacy, property, freedom of speech, etc.

Through children's literature, students will:

1. Learn to appreciate and understand many rights guaranteed by the Constitution.
2. Learn to value important concepts inherent in our democratic society.

Materials Needed: One copy of: *Strega Nona*, Tomie de Paola

The Tale of Peter Rabbit, Beatrix Potter

The Judge, Harve Zemach

Evan's Corner, Elizabeth Starr Hill

The Big Orange Splot, Daniel Manus Pinkwater

The Three Bears, Yuri Salzman

Horton Hatches the Egg, Dr. Seuss

Grade level: Primary

Time to complete: 1 period for each book

Procedure:

1. Each story will be read to or by each student in the class. The teacher may use peer tutors, cooperative groups, older students, choral reading, or tape recorded readings of the books to promote interest and enhance the comprehension of all the students.
2. Constitutional issues and the individual's rights and responsibilities will be the focal point for all the books. The teacher will, either prior to the reading or at the time of discussion, share with the students some history and explanation of the Constitution. The teacher will point out specific application of the Constitution, its Bill of Rights and Amendments, which are found in each of the books.

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Procedure cont.

- 3.** Students shall discuss the application as a class, in small groups, or with a peer. Sharing information can also be done in written projects, role playing activities, skits, video productions which relate the issues brought out in each of the books.
- 4.** Evaluation can be accomplished through observations made during the sharing of ideas and any subsequent activities used by the teacher.

Note: The wording of the Amendments to the Constitution is the original wording and will be difficult for students to understand. The teacher should take the time to explain the amendments. The underlined sections are of particular importance to the story. (See **Simplified Bill of Rights in Appended Materials.**)

**DISCUSSION GUIDE: *Strega Nona*, an old tale retold and illustrated by
Tomie de Paola**

Following rules, privacy, punishment.

4th Amendment ... *The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.*

5th Amendment ... *No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation.*

8th Amendment ... *Excessive bail shall not be required nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel or unusual punishments inflicted.*

14th Amendment - Section 1 ... *All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*

??? Discussion Questions ???

1. What were the responsibilities and rules which Strega Nona placed on Big Anthony?
2. What is the difference between a rule (law) and a responsibility?
3. How did Big Anthony violate Strega Nona's privacy?
4. What does it mean to say "*the punishment should fit the crime*"?
5. Did Big Anthony's "punishment" fit "his crime"?
6. Can you think of another punishment?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter

Following rules, authority, privacy, punishment.

4th Amendment ... *The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.*

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8th Amendment ... *Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.*

??? Discussion Questions ???

1. What rule did Mrs. Rabbit make for her children?
2. What is privacy?
3. How was going into Mr. McGregor's garden not respecting his privacy?
4. Why did Mrs. Rabbit make the rule not to go into Mr. McGregor's garden?
5. Why are there punishments for breaking rules?
6. What was Mr. McGregor's punishment for trespassing?
7. What was Mrs. Rabbit's punishment for trespassing?
8. Were these appropriate punishments?

**DISCUSSION GUIDE: *The Judge*, an untrue tale by Harve Zemach with pictures
by Margot Zemach**

Justice, freedom, punishment.

1st Amendment ... *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.*

6th Amendment ... *In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.*

8th Amendment ... *Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.*

??? Discussion Questions ???

1. Were the defendants speaking the truth?
2. Was it right for the judge to send them to jail?
3. Are people free to speak what they know is true?
4. Can speaking the truth sometimes get a person into trouble?
5. Is there a time when the truth might not be a good idea?
When?
6. Do we (you) have the right to speak what we (you) feel?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: *Evan's Corner* by Elizabeth Starr Hill

Privacy, property.

4th Amendment ... *The right of the people to be secure in their person, houses, papers, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.*

5th Amendment ... *No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.*

14th Amendment - Section 1 ... *All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*

??? Discussion Questions ???

1. Why did Evan want his own space?
2. Do you ever want to be alone? Why?
3. Did anyone ever bother Evan's corner?
4. Did Evan's family respect Evan's right to privacy?
5. How do you have your privacy?
6. When are times when we (you) fail to respect the privacy of others?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: *The Big Orange Splot* by Daniel Manus Pinkwater

Freedom of expression, property.

1st Amendment ... *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.*

14th Amendment - Section 1 ... *All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*

??? Discussion Questions ???

1. Why did everybody on Mr. Plumbean's street like all the houses the same?
2. What happened after the orange paint was dropped on Mr. Plumbean's house?
3. After people told Mr. Plumbean that they wished he would paint his house, why were they unhappy when he did paint his house?
4. Was it all right for Mr. Plumbean to paint his house the way he did?
5. Could it be wrong to paint your house any way you want? When?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: *The Three Bears*, retold and illustrated by Yuri Salzman

Privacy, property, punishment.

4th Amendment ... *The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.*

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??? Discussion Questions ???

1. After Goldilocks peeped in the keyhole and saw no one home, she went right in the three Bears' house. Was it O.K. for Goldilocks to do that?
2. Why did Goldilocks enter the house?
3. What is privacy?
4. Did Goldilocks violate the Bears' privacy by entering the house when they weren't at home? How?
5. When Goldilocks was in the Bears' house, was she respectful of their property?

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DISCUSSION GUIDE: The Three Bears cont.

6. Is it all right to go into someone's desk or schoolbag?
7. Was Goldilocks punished for what she did?
8. What do you think should have happened to Goldilocks?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: *Horton Hatches the Egg* by Dr. Suess

Responsibility, property, freedom, justice.

5th Amendment ... *No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment of indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of war or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be witness against himself, not be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.*

13th Amendment - Section 1 ... *Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.*

14th Amendment - Section 1 ... *All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. Not state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*

??? Discussion Questions **???**

1. Why did Mizzie leave her egg with Horton?
2. In what way was Horton a responsible elephant?
3. Whose property was the egg? What in the story tells you that?
4. Why did the hunters capture Horton and his egg?
5. Was it O.K. or wrong for the hunters to capture Horton and his egg?
6. What rights of freedom do we (you) have?
7. Was justice done when the egg hatched? Why?
8. What do you think happened when Horton finally got home?