



Table of Contents

Episode 1

Episode 2

Episode 3

Episode 4

Know Your Rights UNIVERSITY

S1. EP1 **Study Guide**

LIBERTY GAZETTE

HAT'S OFF TO YOU! OR ON! BECAUSE SCHOOL ANNOUNCES NEW HAT POLICY!!!

by Lisa and Aaron

Eastman-Baldwin Junior High has updated its dress code to allow students to wear hats at school, according to Principal P.A. And the student body is *cap-tivated!*

The change comes after students and teachers said the old policy — a complete ban on headwear — was too limiting.

“The community has been requesting more room for self-expression, and we heard what they have to say,” said Principal P.A. “As long as the hats are not disruptive to learning, we are pleased to support this demonstration of symbolic speech at Eastman-Baldwin.”

Symbolic speech means ideas that are communicated without using words: like through actions, gestures, or how people dress. Just like other forms of free speech, it is protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

For some, this change to Eastman-Baldwin’s dress code took way too long to happen.

“Didn’t the Supreme Court have a ruling about this kind of stuff in the 1960s?” said senior Brandon L. “I can’t believe we’ve had to wait this long to wear the hats we want!”

Brandon was referring to *Tinker vs. Des Moines*, the historic 1969 Supreme Court case. That was when students were suspended for wearing black armbands with peace signs to protest the Vietnam War — a symbolic protest.



With help from the ACLU, the students and their families filed a lawsuit that went all the way to the Supreme Court. The court decided that students don’t lose their right to free speech or expression while they’re at school, so long as student protests don’t disrupt the educational process. It was a big victory for the First Amendment!

Still, even after *Tinker*, schools have been free to set their own dress code policies. That’s why Eastman-Baldwin was previously able to say “no hats allowed.”

But now that the rules have changed, members of the Eastman-Baldwin community can express themselves with whatever beanie, bowler, or beret they choose! And those hats can feature messages and symbols, too — like a peace sign, or a sports team logo.

Even if the hat has a message or symbol on it that others don’t like, the new policy means that the wearer cannot be disciplined more harshly than anyone else, simply because of that message.

The updated policy is a hit among students and staff alike.

“No cap, I’m pro cap,” said Mr. Charles, the newspaper club advisor. “Did I say that right?”

EPISODE 1 STUDY HALL:

Tinker vs. Des Moines: A Fight for First Amendment Rights at School



KEY FACTS

Background

- In December 1965, a group of students at a junior high school in Des Moines, IA made plans to wear black armbands to school as an act of protest against the Vietnam War.
- The school found out about the students' plans. Just before the protest, they passed a rule saying that any student who wore a black armband to school would be asked to remove them — and suspended if they did not comply.
- Mary Beth Tinker, her brother John Tinker, and Christopher Eckardt wore black armbands, acting against the new rule. All three were suspended. Their parents sued the school district.

Arguments for Each Side

- The Tinkers' case argued that wearing the armbands was a form of free speech protected under the First Amendment — and that the school had violated the students' Constitutional rights by suspending them for protesting.
- The school district argued that their actions were reasonable to prevent disruption at the school. They said that public schools are not appropriate settings for protests because they can interfere with student learning and safety.
- **The central questions at the heart of the case:**
 - *Do students have the right to exercise their First Amendment rights to free speech while they are at school?*
 - *Does school have the right to make rules that stop possible disruptions from taking place?*

The Outcome

- The case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, where the justices ruled 7-2 in favor of the students.
- Tinker vs. Des Moines established that a person has the right to exercise free speech while they are at school — as long as the speech does not cause substantial disruption to the school's ability to function.
- Because wearing armbands was a form of silent protest, in the Tinker case, there was no evidence that this use of free speech would have caused a substantial disruption to school.
- However, future cases would need a way to decide what counts as a "substantial disruption." This decision-making process became known as The Tinker Test.

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It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.

— JUSTICE ABE FORTAS

EPISODE 1 STUDY HALL:

Tinker vs. Des Moines: A Fight for First Amendment Rights at School



KEY IDEAS

- The Supreme Court considered the wearing of armbands to be symbolic speech — a form of expression that gets ideas across without using words. Symbolic speech is considered a form of free speech.
- Although the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the students, it still gave schools the ability to limit student speech if that speech causes substantial disruption to learning, or if it interferes with the rights of others.
- Determining whether a form of expression is disruptive enough for schools to be allowed to limit it is known as The Tinker Test.

KEY WORDS

- **Disruption:** A situation in which something is prevented from continuing in its usual way.
- **Protest:** Something that you do to show publicly that you think that something is wrong and unfair, or to support something.
- **Substantial:** Major, serious, or considerable.
- **Sued:** Made a legal claim against someone because they harmed you in some way.
- **Suspended:** Being made to leave school for a short time because you have broken the rules.
- **Symbolic Speech:** A form of expression through action, that doesn't use words.
- **Tinker Test:** The way courts decide whether student speech causes a substantial to learning.
- **Vietnam War:** A war between the United States and Vietnam, a country in southwest Asia, that took place from 1955-1975.
- **Violated:** Acted against an official agreement, law, or principle.

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EPISODE 1 STUDY HALL:

First Amendment FAQs



1. What is the First Amendment?

The First Amendment is one of the most important parts of the Constitution, the United States' founding document.

The Constitution lays out how our system of government works: how it is organized, what its rules are, and how the Constitution itself can be changed. These changes are known as “Amendments.” And the First Amendment is — you guessed it! — the very first change made to the Constitution after it was approved in 1789.

It says:

“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.”

And here are the five “freedoms” it protects:

- **Disruption:** A situation in which something is prevented from continuing in its usual way.
- **Protest:** Something that you do to show publicly that you think that something is wrong and unfair, or to support something.
- **Substantial:** Major, serious, or considerable.
- **Sued:** Made a legal claim against someone because they harmed you in some way.
- **Suspended:** Being made to leave school for a short time because you have broken the rules.
- **Symbolic Speech:** A form of expression through action, that doesn't use words.
- **Tinker Test:** The way courts decide whether student speech causes a substantial to learning.
- **Vietnam War:** A war between the United States and Vietnam, a country in southwest Asia, that took place from 1955-1975.
- **Violated:** Acted against an official agreement, law, or principle.

2. What is Freedom of Expression?

The term “freedom of expression” does not appear in the U.S. Constitution. Rather, it is a term we use to collectively refer to the freedoms protected by the First Amendment — freedoms that allow us to express ourselves, our opinions, and our beliefs without government interference.

EPISODE 1 STUDY HALL:

First Amendment FAQs



3. If we have the right to express ourselves freely, that means we can say or do anything we want... right?!

Not exactly. The First Amendment was designed to protect an individual from the government silencing or censoring them. It does not mean that a person has the freedom to say or do anything that they want, whenever they want, without consequence.

Sometimes, the limits of free speech are clear. Intentionally spreading falsehoods about someone in a way that harms their reputation, for example, is illegal (it's called "defamation"). Different private institutions — like workplaces, social media platforms, and even private schools — may be able to enforce their own rules of conduct around acceptable speech, activity, and behavior.

Other times, determining precisely what qualifies as "freedom of expression" or "freedom of speech" can be complicated. These debates often end up before the Supreme Court — the highest court in the United States, with the final say on legal questions. When a free speech issue goes all the way up to the Supreme Court, it's up to the nine Supreme Court justices to decide if, or how, First Amendment protections apply.

In all cases, words are powerful. So think about how you use them!

4. Do I have First Amendment rights at school?

Yes — with some conditions. The landmark Supreme Court case *Tinker vs. Des Moines* established that you do not lose your right to free speech when you are on school grounds. That means you have the right to speak out, hand out flyers and petitions, and wear expressive clothing in school — as long as by doing so, you are not disrupting the school's normal functions or violating viewpoint-neutral school policies.

But what is a "viewpoint-neutral" policy? And what counts as being "disruptive"? That's where things get tricky.

In a viewpoint-neutral policy, the "viewpoint" is the particular message that's being expressed. A viewpoint-neutral policy doesn't regulate just one side of a hot-button debate, but treats all viewpoints equally. So, for example, if your school has a "no sports logos" dress code, it doesn't matter if you're wearing a Yankees jersey or a Red Sox cap — your school isn't taking sides in that historic sports rivalry! It just cares that you're wearing something with a sports logo in the first place. That's a viewpoint-neutral policy.

As far as what counts as being "disruptive," that's a little less cut-and-dry. It depends on the context of what's going on. But a school disagreeing with your position or thinking your speech is controversial, or in "bad taste," is not enough to qualify.

EPISODE 1 STUDY HALL:

First Amendment FAQs



5. What other rights do I have?

Lots! And the more you know about them, the better you are able to exercise them. You can read up on your rights under the U.S. Constitution and civil rights laws by visiting the ACLU's "Know Your Rights" collection at www.aclu.org/know-your-rights.

Notes

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Know Your Rights UNIVERSITY

S1. EP2 Study Guide

LIBERTY GAZETTE

JAMES AND THE GIANT BAN

by Lisa and Aaron

Aside from causing a paper cut every now and then, books never hurt anyone. Right?

Wrong. Or at least, that's what some people want you to think!!!

Across the country, schools and libraries are being told to get rid of certain books so that people can't read them. They say these books are somehow harmful to readers in some way.

Like, maybe the authors use words some people don't like. Maybe people disagree with the ideas in the books, or they think the characters behave badly.

When someone complains that a book should get taken away, that's called a "book challenge." And if the challenged book ends up taken away, it's called a "book ban."

(This is just Aaron writing now.)

That's what happened to one of my favorite books of all time: James and the Giant Peach, by Roald Dahl. I tried to check it out from the library, only to find out it had been banned!!

(Now back to me and Lisa!)

Book banning goes against our First Amendment right to free speech. Books may not speak out loud, but their written words are considered protected speech, just the same. Authors have the right to write, and readers have the right to read!

So if you've got a problem with a book, we have a solution: instead of banning it... just don't read it! But don't keep others from reading it, either, because that's not fair. A book you don't like might be somebody else's favorite.



After all, some of the best books we've ever read are books that have been banned or challenged. Read them for yourself to see what all the fuss is about. Trust us: IT'S LIT...erary!

AARON & LISA'S TOP FIVE BEST BANNED OR CHALLENGED BOOKS OF ALL TIME:

#5: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*,

by L. Frank Baum

"We'll ban you, Dorothy! And your little dog, too!"

That's right! This classic story has been banned and challenged many times since it was first published more than 100 years ago. People have complained about it being "untrue to life," that it features strong girl characters, and that it describes some witches as being "good," like Glinda.

#4: *Charlotte's Web*, by E.B. White

People have tried to ban this book about Charlotte, a spider who uses the power of words to save a pig named Wilbur, because they object to talking animals. The challengers consider this to be "unnatural" and "blasphemous," or disrespectful towards God. They also think the ending of the book is inappropriate for children. We won't spoil it for you, so you'll have to read Charlotte's Web for yourself to decide if that's true! (Our take: it's not. But you may want to grab tissues while you read, all the same.)

#3: *Captain Underpants*, by Dav Pilkey

A tale about a hero in tighty-whities became the most complained-about book in America for two years in a row (in 2012 and 2013). People say Captain Underpants has bad language and is too violent, making

it "unsuited for [kids]." We say it's hilarious and weird! We laughed our underpants off! So to all you challengers out there, before you throw Captain Underpants in with the dirty laundry, maybe we just agree to disagree?

#2: *New Kid*, by Jerry Craft

This award-winning book, about a Black boy named Jordan who starts 7th grade at a mostly-white school, was banned for a short time in 2021. Some parents were upset by how the book talks about race. They even went so far as to try and cancel a school event with the author, Jerry Craft! Thankfully, a group of reviewers found that there was nothing inappropriate about the book, and it was returned to the shelves.

#1: *James and the Giant Peach*, by Roald Dahl

Our #1 pick for best banned or challenged book is - you guessed it! - Aaron's favorite: James and the Giant Peach, by Roald Dahl. It's a story about a little boy who sets sail for New York in an enormous, magical peach along with an earthworm, a spider, a centipede, a ladybug, and a grasshopper. The book has been challenged and banned for hinting at things that might be inappropriate for kids, and for being too scary. But that completely ignores the fact that this book is super funny and AMAZING!

EPISODE 2 STUDY HALL:

How To Start a Banned Book Club



Book bans and challenges are designed to stop people from reading certain books. Fortunately, there is a fun way to oppose this practice: read them, anyway!

That's what then-high school junior Ella Scott did in 2021, when she discovered that her school district planned to remove books from public school classrooms and library shelves. She and her best friend started a Banned Book Club with their classmates, to exercise their First Amendment rights and decide for themselves what they thought about the books the district didn't want them to read.

Want to do the same, but don't know where to start? Here are five easy steps for getting your Banned Book Club up and running:

Step 1: Invite some fellow readers

Book clubs can be big or small – reading along with just one or two other people can be enough to get started. The important thing is that you're all interested in reading and open to talking about what you've read.

Ask a few friends and/or family members if they'd like to form a book club where the only things you read are banned or challenged books. You can start with two or three other readers, inviting more people to join you each time.

It doesn't matter if you've known your fellow readers for a long time, or if you've just met. One of the joys of having a book club is getting to know others better than you had before. Everyone imagines and interprets a story differently, and it can be a lot of fun to hear what different people in your group think about the same piece of writing. You may be surprised by how much you learn about each person!

Step 2: Pick a book to read

Pick a book for the whole group to read together. This might sound simpler than it is! There have been so many books that have been banned or challenged over the years that it can be hard to know where to begin.

If you know of a book challenge or ban that is underway in your area, you might want to start there. But if not, check out the ACLU's list of Popular Books that have been Banned or Challenged, which groups together titles based on different categories. Or the American Library Association's Challenged Books Archive, which lists the top 10 most frequently challenged books by year, going back to 2001. Common Sense Media also has a list of Frequently Challenged and Banned Books for Kids and Teens that includes everything from picture books to classic literature.

Step 3: Find a copy

If the book you've chosen has been banned where you live, this could be tricky. You may not be able to find it at your public library, or at your school.

Start by asking other people in your book club if they have a copy of the book at home. Once they are done reading, they can pass it back and forth among the book club members.

If not, you might be able to find an online recording of someone reading the book out loud – especially if it's short, like a picture book. The ACLU has an awesome playlist of artists reading from some of their favorite banned books. You might also be able to find an audiobook version to stream. (Audiobooks totally count as reading!)

Finally, if you are able, consider buying the book from a local or online bookseller, or putting together a wish-list for books people could buy for you. Among other things, book bans hurt authors by making it hard for them to earn money from sales of their books.

EPISODE 2 STUDY HALL:

How To Start a Banned Book Club



Step 4: Read and discuss

Now comes the fun part! Read the book on your own. Take note of what you think about it. What do you like or dislike about the story? Which characters do you relate to? What surprises you about the book? What disappoints you? Why do you think someone might find the book controversial enough to challenge or ban it? Would you recommend it to a friend?

When your book club gets together, pose these same questions to the group. It's okay if not everyone agrees; that's what makes book clubs so interesting! Listen to what others have to say about it, and share your own opinions, too.

Once everyone has had a chance to talk about it, see if you can learn more about why the book has been challenged in the first place. Talk about whether the criticisms against the book or its author make sense to you, and what is gained or lost when others can't read it.

Step 5: Decide what book to read next

Congratulations: you've had your first book club meeting! Now it's time to plan the next one.

As a group, decide how to choose the next banned book to read. You can do this a few different ways. Some book clubs make a list of 5-10 books, then go through them one by one until it's time to pick another 5-10 titles. Others nominate a few books per meeting and vote on what they most want to read next. You can also assign a different person to pick what the group should read. There's no right or wrong way to do it! The important thing is that you keep on reading, and thinking, and sharing your ideas.

That's what free speech is all about!

EPISODE 2 STUDY HALL:

Book Bans and Challenges FAQs



1. What is a book challenge? What is a book ban?

When someone makes a complaint about a book they strongly object to, with the goal of getting it removed from a school or library, that's called a book challenge. If they succeed, and the book is taken away so that others can't read it, that's a book ban.

2. Why do people ban or challenge books?

A person or a group might challenge a book if they disagree with the kinds of ideas it expresses. Challengers want to keep others from being exposed to what they consider to be inappropriate ideas and information inside the book, even if it might be valuable to somebody else. These might include ideas about gender, sexuality, race, religion, politics... or even how kids should behave in school!

People have even challenged books because they don't approve of the kind of language, humor, or tone that the author uses. (Captain Underpants by Dav Pilkey is a classic example!)

If enough people with decision-making power – like a school board, or state legislators – agree with a book challenge, they will demand that the book be removed from shelves, even if students want to read it. In other words: they will ban it.

3. Why are book challenges and bans a First Amendment issue?

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects our right to free speech. This means that people are free to share their thoughts and opinions, without fear of the government telling them they can't.

Books may not speak out loud, but the words and ideas they communicate are considered free speech just the same. Book bans keep authors from being able to share their ideas freely – and they keep readers from being able to explore those ideas, too.

It's important to remember that challenging a book is not the same as saying that you don't like a book. Freedom of speech means that we are allowed to express our opinions – even if they are negative! But there is a difference between saying “I don't like this book” and “Because I don't like this book, no one should ever have the chance to read it.” Book challenges and book bans restrict our freedom to make our own decisions and form our own opinions.

EPISODE 2 STUDY HALL:

Book Bans and Challenges FAQs



4. What can I do if I think a book ban is unfair?

There are lots of people working to protect your freedom to read, at organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the American Library Association (ALA), PEN America, and the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC).

If you want to speak out against a book ban or challenge happening where you live, ask a grown-up to help you look through these organization’s resources on their websites. From there, you can decide how you want to get involved in making your voice heard.

Another great way to protest book banning? Read, read, and read some more! You can find a list of some of the most frequently banned books here. And check out “[We Read Banned Books](#),” the ACLU’s banned book video playlist!

Notes

Know Your Rights UNIVERSITY

S1. EP3 **Study Guide**

LIBERTY GAZETTE

NEW CLASS PRESIDENT!

by Lisa and Aaron

Everyone give it up for Elyse K., new 8th grade class president! This basketball star is ready to lead our school government, big time. Your trusty Liberty Gazette team (reporters Aaron and Lisa, plus our advisor Mr. Charles) spoke to Elyse to learn more about what the class president actually does.

Aaron, The Liberty Gazette: Elyse, congratulations on winning the election for 8th grade class president!

Elyse K., 8th grade class president: Thank you! I am super excited!!!!

Lisa, The Liberty Gazette: So tell us, Elyse. As president, what kinds of laws do you plan to create?

Elyse: Uh... what?

Lisa: You're president now, and the president makes all the laws, right?

Elyse: That's... not really how it works.

Lisa: Sure it is! Isn't it?

Mr. Charles, The Liberty Gazette: Not exactly. In our student government, just like in the U.S. government, no one person has the power to make up all the rules or laws. There are different groups that have to work together to make decisions.

Lisa: Interesting... tell me more.

Aaron: Yeah, why don't you explain how our school government works, Madame President!

Elyse: Well, like Mr. Charles said, it takes a lot of students and a lot of teamwork. Our school government is set up just like the U.S. government is, with three different branches.

Aaron: Oh, I know those. The legislative, the executive, and the judicial, right?

Mr. Charles: That's right! The legislative branch, or Congress, comes up with ideas for laws. The executive branch, or the president's office, signs off on those laws. And the judicial branch, which includes the Supreme Court, makes decisions about how to uphold those laws.

Elyse: At Eastman-Baldwin, our school government's legislative branch comes up with ideas that represent the wants and needs of our students.

Lisa: Like strawberry milk drinking fountains.

Elyse: Say what?

Lisa: I'm a student here, and I want – no, I need – a strawberry milk drinking fountain.

Elyse: That's not exactly what I mean... but... I guess we could talk about it?

Lisa: Yesssss!

Mr. Charles: Go on, Elyse. What happens after the legislative branch comes up with ideas?

LIBERTY GAZETTE

Elyse: They write them down and send them over to me, the class president. As the leader of the executive branch, I sign off on each idea.

Aaron: Do you ever not sign off on the legislative branch's ideas?

Elyse: Sure! That's one of the powers of the executive branch. As 8th grade class president, I can "veto" an idea, which is a fancy word that means "no way, we're not doing that."

Lisa: Okay, so let's say the legislative branch brings you, the executive branch, a great idea for strawberry milk drinking fountains. And you say, "What a great idea! Everyone loves strawberry milk! No veto necessary!" And you sign off on it right away, because of course you would. What happens next?

Elyse: Well... I would take the idea to the Principal and we would figure things out from there.

Mr. Charles: Exactly. That's one way our school government works differently from the U.S. government. Our school government doesn't get the final say on school rules... it has to work closely with our school leaders to figure out what kinds of changes are possible.

Lisa: Sure, sure, sure. But come on - Principal P.A. would be all for it.

Elyse: Are we still talking about strawberry milkshakes?

Lisa: Strawberry milk drinking fountains.

Elyse: Right...

Aaron: Elyse, can you tell us more about what you hope to do as 8th grade class president?

Elyse: I think the president's #1 job is to listen to the concerns of our students, and to work together with the other branches of our school government, our teachers and our principal, to make our school the best it can be.

Mr. Charles: Well said.

Lisa: And if I could add just one more thing...

Elyse: Is it that you think our school would be even better with strawberry milk drinking fountains?

Lisa: Yes! How did you know?

Elyse: I told you my #1 job is to listen to the students!

Well, readers, there you have it. An amazing interview with our amazing new 8th grade class president, Elyse! She's a good listener and a good teammate, on the basketball court and in the school government. Electing her was a real slam dunk!

EPISODE 3 STUDY HALL:

How A Bill Becomes A Law



KEY IDEAS

- When the **Founding Fathers** wrote the United States **Constitution**, they did so with a big idea in mind: that no single person or office should hold all the power.
- Instead, the Constitution creates a **separation of powers** that divides powers and responsibilities across our **three branches of government**:
 - **The legislative branch**
 - **The executive branch**
 - **The judicial branch**
- The Constitution also establishes a system of **checks and balances** that give each branch the power to limit the actions of the others. In other words, each government branch can keep the others in check – and this ensures that power remains properly balanced across all three branches.
- Although the three branches are separate, they all share a common purpose: to govern with laws that serve the people of the United States and its Constitution.
- Each branch has a special role to play when it comes to making, enforcing, and interpreting the laws of our country.
- It all starts with an early idea for a law, called a **bill**. The process of turning a bill into a **law** requires collaboration across all three branches.

At-A-Glance: The Three Branches

The Legislative Branch

- Represented by **Congress**
 - Congress is made up of two **chambers** (or sections):
 - **The House of Representatives** (also referred to as “The House”)
 - **The Senate**
 - Both the House and the Senate are made up of elected officials from all 50 states.

- Officials who serve in the House are known as **Representatives**, or Congressmen and Congresswomen; officials who serve in the Senate are known as **Senators**.
- The House is made up of 435 Representatives, and the Senate is made up of 100 Senators.

- Among other responsibilities, Congress has the power to write laws.
- Congressional checks-and-balances include the ability to override a presidential **veto** with a two-thirds majority vote, among others.

The Executive Branch

- The Executive Branch is made up of the President of the United States and his or her Presidential Cabinet.
- That’s why we sometimes say the Executive Branch is represented by the **White House**.
- The Cabinet includes the Vice President, the Attorney General, and the leaders of 15 executive federal departments (such as the Department of State, the Department of Treasury, etc.)
- The President has the power to sign a bill into law or to reject it, using a special checks-and-balances power known as a veto.

The Judicial Branch

- The Judicial Branch is made up of our federal and state courts.
- The job of the Judicial Branch is to interpret our laws and decide how they apply to disputes brought before the courts.
- The Judicial Branch also examines whether laws are **constitutional**, or allowed according to the U.S. Constitution.
 - One of the Judicial Branch’s main powers of checks-and-balances is the ability to overturn laws it deems **unconstitutional**, or not allowed according to the Constitution.

EPISODE 3 STUDY HALL:

How A Bill Becomes A Law



The Judicial Branch (cont.)

- In our courts system, there are “lower” courts and “higher” courts. Court cases start in the lower courts and can sometimes move to higher courts if there is disagreement about the lower courts’ decision.
- **The Supreme Court** is the highest court of all.
 - There are nine Supreme Court Justices who consider and vote on the issues brought before them.
 - These judges are appointed by the president and confirmed by Congress.

How A Bill Becomes A Law

It All Starts in Congress

- Lawmaking starts with the legislative branch, **in Congress**.
- When a Representative or a Senator has an idea for a law or wants to make a change to an existing law, they write and **sponsor** a bill, introducing it in the chamber where they serve. That chamber will go through a process of reviewing, changing, and voting on the bill before sending it to the other chamber for a similar process.
 - Both the House and the Senate must vote in favor of the bill to keep it moving forward.
- Let’s say a bill is first introduced in the House. Next, a House **committee** – a small group of Representatives – will study the bill. They research it, talk to the public about it, and debate it with other Representatives. The committee can make changes to the bill to reflect what they’ve learned in their study.
- When the bill passes the committee’s review, it is brought back to the House for a vote.
- If a **simple majority** (more than half) of Representatives vote in favor of the bill, then the bill moves to the Senate.

- In the Senate, the bill will go through a similar process: committee review, debate, changes, and a Senate vote. A simple majority vote will move the bill further once again.
- Finally, a **conference committee** made up of House and Senate members works out any last differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill. When they finish, that bill returns to the House and Senate for final approval.
- At last, the bill is ready to move out of the legislative branch and over to the executive branch for the next step in the process.

Next Stop: The White House

- The leader of the executive branch is the **president**.
- Once the president receives a bill from congress, he or she has 10 days to decide what to do next.
- The president will either sign the bill into law or reject it – an action known as a presidential **veto**.
- If the president doesn’t sign or veto a bill within 10 days, the bill automatically becomes a law.

Vetoes

- Vetoes are a form of checks and balances. By being able to veto a bill, the president keeps Congress from being the only branch with the power to create laws.
- But Congress has its own powers in this situation. Congress can **override** a presidential veto if two-thirds of both the House and the Senate vote in favor of doing so. (That’s another example of checks and balances at work!)
- Still, a two-thirds majority vote can be hard to accomplish. It means many more people than just a simple majority must agree to it.
- Only a few presidential vetoes have been successfully overturned by Congress. Usually, a presidential veto marks the end of the road for a bill.

EPISODE 3 STUDY HALL:

How A Bill Becomes A Law



Veto (cont.)

- However, if Congress succeeds in overriding a president's veto, then the bill becomes a law without the president's signature.

The Judicial Branch

- Once a law is in place, it is up to the Judicial Branch to **interpret it**: consider its meaning and how to apply it to disputes in our court system.
- The Judicial Branch can decide if a law is constitutional – meaning, if the rules of the U.S. Constitution allow it.
- If the judicial branch determines that a law is unconstitutional, that law can no longer be enforced.

Key Terms

Bill: A written proposal for a law; a rough draft of an idea that could turn into a law.

Branches of Government: The three equal parts of the U.S. government; the Legislative Branch, the Executive Branch, and the Judicial Branch.

Chambers of Congress: The two parts of our Congress; the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Checks and Balances: A system that gives each branch of government the ability to place limits on the other branches' powers.

Committees: Small groups in each chamber of Congress. There are House Committees and Senate Committees.

Conference Committee: A group made up of members from both the House and the Senate.

Congress: The collective name for elected lawmakers in the House and the Senate; the legislative branch.

Constitution: The document establishing the basic principles, structure, and powers of our government.

Constitutional: Officially allowed by the rules of the U.S. Constitution.

Founding Fathers: Important leaders who took part in the American Revolution and helped form our system of government.

House of Representatives: One of the two chambers of Congress.

Interpret: To consider and explain the meaning of something.

Law: A rule, or the system of rules, that guide our country.

Override: The power to change someone else's action or decision.

President: The highest elected official in the United States; the leader of the Executive Branch.

Representatives: Elected officials who serve in the House of Representatives in Congress.

Senate: One of the two chambers of Congress.

Senators: Elected officials who serve in the Senate in Congress.

Separation of Powers: A system that ensures no one person or group holds all the power of the government; the splitting up of powers and responsibilities across the three branches of government.

Simple majority: A requirement that more than half of voters vote in favor of something in order for it to move forward.

Sponsor: To officially introduce or support a proposal for a new law (a bill).

Supreme Court: The highest court in our judicial system; part of the Judicial Branch.

Unconstitutional: Not allowed by the Constitution.

EPISODE 3 STUDY HALL:

How A Bill Becomes A Law



Key Terms (cont.)

Veto: The president's ability to reject a bill and stop it from becoming a law.

White House: The office of the president; the Executive Branch.

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EPISODE 3 STUDY HALL:

The Three Branches of Government FAQs



1. What are the three branches of the United States government?

The U.S. Constitution divides our government into three separate parts, known as **branches**. They are the **legislative branch**, the **executive branch**, and the **judicial branch**.

Each branch has its own powers and responsibilities, and all three must work together to create the laws that guide our country.

2. Why do we have three branches, anyway?

Before the American Revolution, most countries had a single ruler in charge – like a king or an emperor – who made laws that people were forced to obey.

When the colonists won the American War of Independence, they now had the opportunity to create an entirely new system of government – one that would make sure no single person had total power to make the laws for its citizens. When our Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution, they created a **separation of powers** that divides lawmaking across three separate branches, and a system of **checks and balances** that keeps each branch from overstepping its powers.

3. What does each branch do?

When it comes to lawmaking, each branch has a role to play. Simply put:

- The legislative branch creates laws,
- The executive branch implements laws (or puts laws into action),
- And the judicial branch interprets laws (or decides how to apply the law to legal matters in our courts).

If you're curious about each step of the lawmaking process, check out the Study Guide on how a bill becomes a law!

EPISODE 3 STUDY HALL:

The Three Branches of Government FAQs



4. Who represents each branch?

The legislative branch is represented by Congress, which is made up of two chambers: the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The White House represents the executive branch. The president is its leader, while the vice president and the members of the presidential cabinet (the leaders of different government departments) make up the rest of the branch.

Finally, the judicial branch is represented by our federal court system. There are three levels and types of courts in this system: District Courts, Courts of Appeal, and the Supreme Court – the highest court in the United States.

5. What are checks and balances?

Checks and balances refer to the special powers each branch of government has to limit or change the actions of another branch. They exist to keep any one branch from having too much power, all on its own. Checks and balances help make sure lawmaking is a fair and collaborative process, with many people working together to make decisions on behalf of the American people.

Notes

Know Your Rights UNIVERSITY

S1. EP4 Study Guide

LIBERTY GAZETTE

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO ON OUR SUMMER VACATIONS

by Lisa and Aaron



Eastman-Baldwin Junior High! Are you ready for summer?

We sure are. Because this is going to be our Summer of Community.

Wanna know what that means? Okay, we'll tell you!

It means that this summer, we are gonna get to know our neighbors. We're gonna meet up and talk about things we care about. And we're gonna see if we can work together and make change!

Mr. Charles says that community is like a foundation for a house. It holds the house up, even if the ground gets shaky. And we don't know about you, but whenever we look at the news, things can definitely feel shaky sometimes.

That's why a strong community is so important. But like any foundation, ya gotta build it first!

So we've been thinking up all sorts of ways to bring people together this summer.

Maybe we'll start a banned books club at the library.

Maybe we'll get together to clean up the park.

Maybe we'll organize a lemonade stand and food drive for the food bank. Drop off canned goods, get an ice-cold drink!

Maybe we'll host a letter-writing pizza party where we write to our representatives in Congress and tell them what we think about what's going on in the country.

Whatever we end up doing, it'll be fun because we'll be doing it together. So come join us! Or invite us to your community event! We're super fun at parties!!!!

See you this summer, guys! Til then, this is Lisa and Aaron for the Liberty Gazette, signing off!



1. I heard Mr. Charles say “Our rights and freedoms are guaranteed by the Constitution and defended by individuals and civil rights organizations and foundationally rooted in community.” What on earth does that mean?!

Great question! Let’s take it piece by piece.

Our rights and freedoms are guaranteed by the Constitution...: The United States Constitution is our country’s founding document and supreme law. Through the Bill of Rights and other amendments, the Constitution guarantees that all people living in the United States are entitled to specific rights and freedoms.

...and defended by individuals...: It is up to each and every one of us to stand up for our rights and freedoms.

...and civil rights organizations...: Sometimes, it takes more than individuals to protect and uphold our civil liberties. That’s where civil rights organizations come in. These are groups of people working together to fight for equality and fair treatment for all.

...and foundationally rooted in community: As humans living side by side with one another, we exist in community with others. Our system of government, our rights, and our freedoms must work to protect all of us.

In short: We have rights and freedoms. It’s up to us, as individuals and communities, to protect them. And civil rights organizations are here to help.

2. What are civil rights organizations?

Civil rights organizations bring people together on behalf of civil rights issues. These groups educate the public, advocate for change, and challenge unfair laws and policies. They may include lawyers, political advocates, researchers, community organizers, volunteers, and others – all working together towards a common goal of liberty and justice for all.

Some organizations may focus specifically on advancing or protecting the civil rights of a particular group of people whose rights are at risk. Others, like the ACLU, work to defend the rights of all people nationwide.



3. What is the ACLU?

The ACLU stands for the American Civil Liberties Union. It was founded in 1920 by a small group of civil rights activists who felt that the government was unfairly stepping on the rights of people who disagreed with its actions. They decided to take a stand against what they believed was a violation of the Bill of Rights. The ACLU has been educating about and defending the rights of people all across America ever since, with offices across all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington D.C. Like other civil rights organizations, they bring together a wide group of people – from civil rights attorneys to community volunteers – to act as “guardians of liberty.”

4. What do civil rights attorneys do?

Civil rights attorneys help people who have been hurt by actions or rules that unfairly limit their rights and freedoms. As experts in our country’s laws, civil rights attorneys offer advice and advocate on behalf of the people they represent. They know how to use the legal system to fight for people’s equal protection under the law: by filing lawsuits, arguing court cases, and appealing losses (or asking a higher court to reconsider a lower court’s ruling). Civil rights attorneys have taken cases all the way up to the Supreme Court – *Tinker vs. Des Moines*, for example!

Notes

EPISODE 4 STUDY HALL:

Pop Quiz

Think you know your rights?

Test your knowledge with this pop quiz!



1. What is “Freedom of Expression”?

- a. One of the five freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment.
- b. How we collectively refer to the ideas set forth in the First Amendment.
- c. One of the ten amendments in the Bill of Rights.
- d. All of the above.

2. In Tinker vs. Des Moines, the Supreme Court ruled that students:

- a. Must put aside their First Amendment rights at the schoolhouse gate.
- b. Must check their hats at the schoolhouse gate.
- c. Don’t lose their First Amendment rights while at school.
- d. None of the above.

3. “Symbolic speech” refers to:

- a. Ideas communicated through symbols.
- b. Ideas communicated through actions.
- c. Ideas communicated through clothes.
- d. All of the above.

4. What is a book challenge?

- a. When someone urges you to read a lot of books in a short amount of time.
- b. When someone attempts to get a book removed from a school or library.
- c. When someone succeeds in removing a book from a school or library.
- d. When you read a book that is complex or difficult.

5. Why is book banning a First Amendment issue?

- a. Because free speech applies to ideas communicated with spoken words, written words, or without using any words at all.
- b. Because the First Amendment protects the freedom of the press, which includes writing.
- c. Because it puts our ability to freely exchange ideas and receive information at risk.
- d. All of the above.

EPISODE 4 STUDY HALL:

Pop Quiz

Think you know your rights?

Test your knowledge with this pop quiz!



6. What are the three branches of the U.S. government?

- a. The legislative, executive, and judicial branches
- b. Congress, the White House, and the Supreme Court
- c. he House of Representatives, The Senate, and the White House.

7. Which of the following are examples of checks and balances in the government?

- a. The judicial branch can declare a law unconstitutional.
- b. The president can veto a bill.
- c. Congress can override a presidential veto with a two-thirds majority vote.
- d. All of the above.

8. True or False: The president has the power to create laws.

- a. True: As the head of the United States government, the president has the power to make the rules of the country.
- b. False: Only the legislative branch – Congress – has the power to create laws.

9. What do civil rights organizations do?

- a. Educate the public on their civil rights.
- b. Fight civil rights violations through the courts.
- c. Build community to protect people's civil rights.
- d. All of the above.

10. Building community is...

- a. A way to show people you care about them.
- b. A way to be a helper.
- c. A way to get involved with issues that matter to you.
- d. All of the above.

Pop Quiz Answer Key



1. What is “Freedom of Expression”?

b. How we collectively refer to the ideas set forth in the First Amendment.

The phrase “freedom of expression” isn’t written anywhere in the Constitution, but it is essentially the big idea at the heart of the First Amendment.

2. In Tinker vs. Des Moines, the Supreme Court ruled that students:

c. Don’t lose their First Amendment rights while at school.

Justice Abe Fortas wrote: *“It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.”*

3. “Symbolic speech” refers to:

d. All of the above.

“Symbolic speech” refers to ideas communicated without the use of words.

4. What is a book challenge?

b. When someone attempts to get a book removed from a school or library.

A book challenge is an attempt to ban a book. A ban is when the challenge is successful.

5. Why is book banning a First Amendment issue?

d. All of the above.

No matter the reason, book bans and the First Amendment are not compatible.

Pop Quiz Answer Key



6. What are the three branches of the U.S. government?

- a. The legislative, executive, and judicial branches**

7. Which of the following are examples of checks and balances in the government?

- a. All of the above.**

Each branch of government can put checks on the power of the other branches, keeping power balanced across all three.

8. True or False: The president has the power to create laws.

- b. False: Only the legislative branch – Congress – has the power to create laws.**

That's no accident! Our Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution this way because they didn't want any one person to have lawmaking power.

9. What do civil rights organizations do?

- d. All of the above.**

Civil rights organizations work through a variety of channels to protect the rights of people in America.

10. Building community is...

- d. All of the above.**

In addition, building community is one of the best things you can do to feel better when you are feeling down!