



NSDAR Educational Resources Committee

“The Right to Petition for Redress of Grievances-- 1st Amendment”

Contributor: Mary Elizabeth (Beth) Stricklin Bates **Grade Level:** 12

1. **Identify the standards to be addressed:**

How Does the Government Established by the Constitution Embody the Purposes, Values, and Principles of American Democracy? What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

2. **Statement of the objective and lesson outcomes:**

Students will learn about their right to petition the government for redress of grievances. Students will retain examples of how that is accomplished in the 21st century.

3. **Materials, resources, and technology to be used by teacher/students:**

Tablet or Laptop. References: Interpretation: Right to Assemble and Petition | The National Constitution Center; www.mtsu.edu/firstamendment

4. **Introduction of the topic:**

1. Ask students if they have ever moved?
2. Ask them if they have ever had to travel in a wagon or by boat to get to their new home.
3. Ask what type of roads or river did they travel on?
4. Today we are going to learn about a family that was here just as Tennessee was becoming a state. We are going to hear about how they moved from place to place and how they helped settle Middle and West Tennessee, Alabama and Texas.

5. **Procedure for instruction:**

Teacher starts the discussion by asking the following: Which of the following historic events or documents is relevant to the right to petition the government for redress of grievances? 1. The Magna Carta 1215 2. The English Bill of Rights. 1689 3. The Declaration of Independence. 4. The anti-slavery movement in the 19th century. 5. The Women's suffrage campaign. All the above. If a student identifies one of the above, the teacher will call on him or her to explain. The right to petition is contained in the Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights as Kings John and James II had ignored petitions for grievances. So had King George III as indicated in the Declaration of Independence. The right to petition hit a snag when the anti-slavery movement, led by then Congressman and former President John Quincy Adams filed so many petitions that Congress was not able to deal with anything else. Congress thus limited debate on all petitions. The women's suffrage movement used petitions because those who cannot vote can still petition.

We have learned that the Roaring Fork Nature Driving Trail in the Smoky Mountains National Park is scheduled to be closed to vehicles and open only to hikers. Divide into groups, each group will be assigned a particular identity. How would you exercise the right protected by this amendment? (Students can access the trail on their tablets while the teacher is elsewhere). Example: <https://www.mysmokymountainpark.com/road-trips/scenic-drives/roaring-fork-motor-nature-trail-scenic-drive/>. Group 1: You own a service station located near the

beginning of the trail. The teacher will circulate among groups. She will point out that these folks have an individual financial interest in opposing the closure. They can petition a federal court to redress their grievances either by issuing an injunction preventing the move or asking for monetary damages. Group 2: You live in the area and are people with physical disabilities. Driving and riding in a car is by far the best way to enjoy the park in this location. You can also petition a court as there are statutes (Congress passed laws) that may help but your right to petition your elected officials may be the most effective move. The definition of petition implies that more than one person is aggrieved. The teacher will suggest that signatures from residents who just enjoy the trail, business owners who benefit, and even teens too young to vote can join to gather in a petition to their U.S. Representatives and U.S. Senators as well as the White House. To find your representative put the address here. [Members of the U.S. Congress | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](https://www.congress.gov/) Group 3: You support closing the trail to motor vehicles. You will not be petitioning for redress of grievances but what other right in the First Amendment are you exercising? Freedom of Speech. If you obtain a parade permit and gather peacefully, you can exercise your right to assembly as can those of you opposed to the closure.

Class discussion-The First Amendment contains many unbelievably valuable rights. The right to petition may be the least well known. Does anyone know how it differs from Freedom of Speech? (Take answers from the class.) One answer, if needed, First free speech can deal with matters unrelated to the government. Ask for examples. One example is a pep rally in favor of your school winning a football game. Do you always petition the courts? Ask for opinions. Share this thought. In some instances, you may lack standing. That is, you lack a particular interest that affects you differently from all other citizens. The service station owner would have “standing” concerning road closures and construction in front of his business. Will an elected official act on your petition? Ask for opinions. Discuss: Only sometimes—we elect officials to exercise their best judgement; they are not bound by our requests. This is why communities organize to secure many signatures on a petition. Will government officials be more likely to act when they have multiple petitions or signatures? Absolutely, but the elected official has an obligation to consider the entire situation. Split class into groups of 3-5 students and ask them to think of an instance of their community which might be changed by the “Right to Petition.” Make a class list on the board.

6. **Assessment of Understanding:**

Students will describe how they can exercise their right to petition for redress by drafting a 200-to-250-word essay. They should use one of the examples from the class list. Each essay should clearly state the problem and give two reasons a change is necessary. The essay should state one solution for the problem. Students who chose the same problem will conduct a peer review of their essays and combine the best thoughts of each to share with the entire class. Extension: Classes could send their petitions to a public official.