

learning from the headlines

WORLD
Press Freedom
DAY 2011

teacher notes

World Press Freedom Day provides an opportunity to discuss the First Amendment in your students' own lives. The www.splc.org website includes guides to press freedoms and censorship at public and private institutions that are designed for classroom discussion purposes, including:

- A comprehensive guide to the only high school journalism case ever decided by the U.S. Supreme Court, *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988), <http://www.splc.org/pdf/HazelwoodGuide.pdf>
- A clickable map that shows which states (AR, CA, CO, IA, KS, MA, OR) offer public school students better legal protection than the bare minimum provided by the U.S. Constitution:
<http://www.splc.org/knowyourrights/statelegislation.asp>

To demonstrate the importance of “transparency” in government, choose a news source (print or online) and have your students review the ways in which journalists – and their readers – depend on information disclosed by government agencies. Examples may include: stories about state or local budgets, police and court news, information released by public-health or consumer-protection agencies, and so on. The federal Freedom-of-Information Act, and the state versions of that act, facilitate access to this type of information. Ask the students to imagine life as a journalist in a country with few, or no, mandatory disclosure laws. How would journalists do their jobs? (Persuasion, cultivation of sources, increased reliance on word-of-mouth rather than documentation – with an increased risk of inaccuracy.)

Encourage your students to think about how America would be a different place if the professional news media – CNN, Fox News, CNBC, the Associated Press, major newspapers – operated under the same restrictions as the student media. The two primary legal standards that apply to student expression are:

- The *Tinker* standard: The government can stop a story from being distributed if the story contains illegal material (such as obscenity), or if it will incite a substantial disruption.
- The *Hazelwood* standard: The government can stop a story from being distributed if the censorship serves some legitimate educational purpose.

How would radio, television, newspapers and magazines be different if they were subject to being censored under one of these school-based First Amendment standards, instead of the *New York Times v. United States* “no prior restraint” standard. What types of material might the government try to stop from being seen? What would be the impact on society? How might people respond?

Additional Resources

“Internet Rights and Wrongs: Choices & Challenges in a Networked World,” Speech by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at George Washington University, Feb. 15, 2011 (with video):
<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/02/156619.htm>

“Freedom in the World 2011 Survey,” Freedom House, includes maps, tables and graphs rating countries as “free,” “partly free” or “not free”: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=594>

“Press Freedom Index 2010,” Reporters Without Borders (with table):
<http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2010,1034.html>

World Press Freedom Day channel on YouTube, includes user-produced videos about the meaning of press freedom: <http://www.youtube.com/user/WPFD2011>