

## American Government The Bill of Rights: Part II

The founding fathers believed people are born with certain **inalienable**<sup>1</sup> rights. These are rights we were born with that no one could take away. To protect these rights, they created 10 amendments to the Constitution known as the Bill of Rights. The first 8 amendments cover **fundamental**<sup>2</sup> rights and freedoms of every citizen. The 9th Amendment forbids the government to limit freedoms and rights not covered in the Constitution. The 10th Amendment limits the power of the federal government to the Constitution.

Three of the most important amendments from the Bill of Rights are listed below. Beside the amendment is a description of the right that it protects.

### Amendment I – Freedom of Speech

In some countries, people cannot always say what they are thinking. Under United States law, people are not punished for speaking their opinions. Newspaper **editors**<sup>3</sup> can print whatever they want. They can even write criticisms of the government. Once the philosopher Voltaire said, “I may disagree with what you have to say, but I shall defend, to the death, your right to say it.” This idea of agreeing to disagree helps strengthen our democracy.

### Amendment VI – Trial by Jury

In the United States, people accused of a crime are innocent until proven guilty. They can't be put in jail until they have a trial. This amendment guarantees everyone's right to a trial by a jury. A jury is made up of men and women from all different backgrounds. The jury listens to **evidence**<sup>4</sup> in a case. The jury decides whether a person is guilty or innocent of a crime. The person's **fate**<sup>5</sup> does not rest with just one judge.

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<sup>1</sup> **inalienable** – that cannot be given away or taken away

<sup>2</sup> **fundamental** – basic and necessary

<sup>3</sup> **editors** – people in charge of a newspaper or magazine

<sup>4</sup> **evidence** – information and facts that help prove something or make you believe that something is true

<sup>5</sup> **fate** – the force that some people believe controls events and decides what happens to people

**Amendment VIII – No Cruel and Unusual Punishment**

Have you ever heard the phrase “cruel and unusual punishment”? In some countries, governments put people in jail for no reason at all. They treat people found guilty of a crime in a very brutal way. This amendment protects people accused of crimes in the United States. They will not be tortured or punished. They won’t be treated in cruel or unusual ways that hurt them.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Paragraph three states that “Under United States law, people are not punished for speaking their opinions.” What specific U.S. law protects this right?
  - a. The Bill of Rights
  - b. The Constitution
  - c. The First Amendment
  - d. The Declaration of Independence
  
2. The word “fate” in paragraph four means almost the same thing as
  - a. life
  - b. future
  - c. destiny
  - d. muse
  
3. Why is it important to allow jury trials?
  - a. Because they take longer
  - b. So people can be protected from evidence that is untrue
  - c. So citizens can have a better chance at a fair trial
  - d. So people can play a role as a juror in government
  
4. Which of the following is NOT a fact, but an opinion?
  - a. “I may disagree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”
  - b. The jury listens to evidence in a case.
  - c. In some countries, people cannot always say what they are thinking.
  - d. In the United States, people accused of a crime are innocent until proven guilty.
  
5. Which of the following is NOT a right that is talked about in the Bill of Rights?
  - a. The right to say whatever you want
  - b. The right to never have to pay any taxes
  - c. The right to a trial by a jury
  - d. The right to not be punished cruelly, even if you commit a crime

6. Reread Voltaire's saying: "I may disagree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." What do you think he meant? What is more important to him than any belief he might disagree with?

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7. What did the 10th Amendment do?

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

Being able to say your opinion is protected in the United States, \_\_\_\_\_ in other countries you can get in trouble for saying what you think.

- a. finally
- b. also
- c. before
- d. but

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

The 8th Amendment keeps people from being tortured in the United States.

What? the 8th Amendment

(does) What? \_\_\_\_\_

Where? \_\_\_\_\_

10. **Vocabulary Word:** forbid: to order that something not be done.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Teacher Guide and Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 830

**Featured Text Structure:** Enumerative – the writer includes a list, giving examples of something. This text structure is often combined with cause/effect or problem/solution

**Passage Summary:** The Bill of Rights was added to the United States Constitution to protect things like people's freedom. Three of the amendments in the Bill of Rights address freedom of speech, trial by jury, and cruel or unusual punishment.

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  - b. The Constitution
  - c. The First Amendment**
  - d. The Declaration of Independence
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6. Reread Voltaire's saying: "I may disagree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." What do you think he meant? What is more important to him than any belief he might disagree with?

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary but could include that he means even if he doesn't agree with your opinions or beliefs, he thinks that you should be able to say them. It is important to him that people have the freedom to say what they want to say even if other people don't agree with it.

7. What did the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment do?

**Suggested answer:** The 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment limits the power of the federal government to what is already written in the Constitution. [paragraph 1]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

Being able to say your opinion is protected in the United States, \_\_\_\_\_ in other countries you can get in trouble for saying what you think.

- a. finally
- b. also
- c. before
- d. **but**

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment keeps people from being tortured in the United States.

What? the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment

(does) What? **keeps people from being tortured**

Where? **in the United States**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** forbid: to order that something not be done.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.