

## Religious Freedom?

**WebQuest Description:** Do we have the freedom to follow our own religion without fear of oppression?

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Curriculum:** Social Studies

**Keywords:** religious freedom, religious beliefs, founding fathers, modern society

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### Introduction

History tells us that the first English men and women (the first in a long line of immigrants) who came to America made the decision to leave their homeland in order to be free to practice their religion publicly without fear of persecution or oppression. But is that still true? Are we truly free to follow our own religious convictions? Current events would suggest that this is no longer the case. If most citizens in the country are free to practice their religion but smaller groups of citizens are not, are we any better than the oppressors that drove our ancestors out of Europe? Unquestionably, Christianity is practiced by the largest percentage of U.S. citizens and their history is well established. What if we turn our focus to some of the fringe elements of religions found within our borders? What if we take the time to learn what their beliefs are and whether they are free to practice those beliefs? Below are five articles that report on the violence against those who worship differently than the mainstream public. Even as we hear about the latest picketing by the Westboro Baptist church (more often than not - at the funerals of soldiers who died to give them that right) to spread their, some say, twisted interpretation of the Bible, are we really saying that this is superior to the Amish faith? While they are quick to hide behind the first amendment, they refuse to see that the same amendment also gives their victims that same right. Just as we are free to practice our faith, we are also free to practice no faith. Do you believe that an atheist who does not believe in God; or an agnostic who doesn't believe nor disbelieve but is willing to look at the evidence, is entitled to those same protections? In addition to the articles I have also included two video links one about religious freedom and the other on atheism. I encourage you to watch both and if you write a review of them (not required) you will receive bonus points toward your final project.

### Tasks

Your group (each group will have four members) will study these three important historical documents – The Declaration of Independence, The Bill of Rights, and The Constitution and with your understanding of them, tell us in a 1-2 page paper whether you think it is possible for the United States to have unilateral religious freedom. Then you will look at four different religions and given the course of current events, see if they enjoy the religious freedoms set forth by the founding fathers. The communities you will be looking at are the Amish, Hutterites, Islam, and Sikh religions. You will define their way of life and religious practices, and then answer the questions: (1) Are they enjoying the religious freedoms set forth in these historical documents? (2) Give a theory for why or why not these religions practice free from persecution? (3) What is the difference between persecution and oppression? (4) How do you think that their cause can be better understood so that they can practice their religion freely?

### Process

Technology Requirements: Computer with Internet access Printer Scanner Microsoft PowerPoint software Microsoft Word PowerPoint Slide Projector Split into groups of at least four members. Start by exploring the idea of religious freedom by studying the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and The Constitution and then write a short essay on your understanding of religious freedom from these historical documents. Each member of the group needs to select one of the four religious groups to explore: (1) Amish, (2) Hutterites, (3) Islam and (4) Sikh. Research the group you chose. You may use but are not limited to the links provided here. Thoroughly research their lifestyle and religion making sure to supply a brief history of the origin of each group. Your research should be compiled in a report (with a minimum of 500 words) on the religious beliefs and lifestyle of the group you have selected. Compile the four essays and the original essay from step one and put together the final report complete with your opinion of whether these groups enjoy religious freedom or not and why. Put together a PowerPoint presentation explaining your findings with graphics and/or photos to share with the class. Make sure your presentation includes a reference page showing the sources for your materials both written and graphic. The due date is two weeks from start of the project to the finish.

### Evaluation

Category and Score	Poor	Below average	Average	Excellent	Score
Working in a Group	Individual did not work effectively in a group and did not contribute to the development of the presentation - Score 1	The individual attempted to work effectively in the group however did not adequately contribute to the development of the presentation - Score 2	The individual worked effectively in the group and made a significant contribution to the development of the presentation - Score 3	The individual worked extremely well in the group and made an excellent contribution to the development of the presentation - Score 4	1-4
Research	The individual did not research the material adequately and did not provide the minimum required essay on their subject. - Score 1	The individual attempted to do adequate research and provided the minimum required essay on their subject. - Score 2	The individual did effective research and provided a well written essay on their subject. - Score 3	The individual did thorough research and provided an excellent written essay on their subject. - Score 4	1-4
Presentation	The group presentation does not adequately represent the subject of the research. Offers little critical thought or theory. - Score 1	The group presentation attempted to adequately represent the subject of the research. Offers some critical thought or theory - Score 2	The group presentation adequately represents the subject of the research. Offers good critical thought or theory - Score 3	The group presentation represents an outstanding understanding of the research. Offers excellent critical thought or theory. - Score 4	1-4
				Total Score	

## Conclusion

The objective of this project is to provide an understanding of the meaning of religious freedom. We have all been told the story about why the pilgrims made the perilous voyage across the ocean to an unknown land - in order to be free to worship their god as they saw fit. Somewhere between the time of the pilgrims and today, we have lost that freedom. What effects have current events, since 9/11, had that changed the way we viewed some religions? Anyone who even seems to be a Muslim is harassed and accused of being a terrorist. A man storms into a Sikh temple and begins shooting the members in a blind rage. Amish people are ridiculed for their "backward" lifestyle. Up until recently the Hutterites were a very low profile communal group. Then reality TV became a fad and it is a toss up whether they are helping or hurting these groups. We are mired in a time of mistrust and fear. Can we look backward and find the true religious freedom or even then was that freedom an illusion? If you are left after this exercise with a curiosity about the subject of religious freedom, then we can count this project a success. For more on the subject of religious freedom, check out the following websites.

## Teacher Page

This lesson is about religious freedom in America. From the time of the colonist to today we seem to have lost this concept if we ever had it to begin with. This project is slated for one and a half to two week time period. Please feel free to borrow or enhance any part of this lesson plan with the hope that you will pay it forward and make yours available for someone else to use.

### Standards

This is part of the Social Studies program for grades 9-12 as a study in a module to Learn about the mythology, legends, values and beliefs of a people.

### Credits

I would like to thank Anna Brockhoff for her format of the evaluation page from her webquest [Is Mandatory Detention for Asylum Seekers Humane?](http://zunal.com/webquest.php?w=160522) <http://zunal.com/webquest.php?w=160522>

### Other