



December 15 is a very important date in American history—it is Bill of Rights Day! Why? On this date in 1791, The Bill of Rights became part of the United States Constitution. This was only four years after the delegates to Constitutional Convention of Philadelphia signed the Constitution and only three years after the Constitution became the Law of the Land. The Bill of Rights, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence are the most important documents in our nation's founding and history.

What is the Bill of Rights? It is the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution. An amendment is a change or addition to the Constitution. Why did our Constitution need ten amendments so soon after its adoption? This is one of the most interesting stories about the early days of our country. Some of our founders, like Patrick Henry, felt there were not enough freedoms and rights mentioned in our Constitution. Others, like James Madison, felt our Constitution protected all the people's rights and freedoms even though they were not mentioned. The compromise between the two groups is the Bill of Rights. For more than 200 years, the Bill of Rights has been used by many people to ensure their freedoms.

Teaching activities:

Grades 4-6: Look at Amendments 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8 in the Bill of Rights. List all of the rights and freedoms contained in those amendments. As a class, collect newspaper articles that are related to the rights and freedoms guaranteed in those amendments. Why did our Founding Fathers include these freedoms and rights in the Bill of Rights?

Grades 7-9: Look at Amendments 2 and 3 in the Bill of Rights. Why do you think these two amendments were put in the Bill of Rights? Do you think they will still be in there if the Bill of Rights was written today? How did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. use the rights and freedoms found in the Bill of Rights to help segregation?

Grades 10-12: The two groups who argued about the need for a Bill of Rights were the Federalists and Anti-Federalists. Research their views on the Bill of Rights and then prepare a debate on the desirability of having a Bill of Rights. Are some of their arguments still relevant today? Why was the Fourteenth Amendment needed to make the Bill of Rights an actual protection of people's rights?



(Your Logo)

