

The Stakes are High - Is Speech Free in Today's Digital World?

Developed by Catherine Hartman

Resources

Choose from the list below or select extracts from two or three of them depending upon the level of the class.

- **Read or Listen to** Tom Gjelten
[Silencing WikiLeaks A Free Speech Challenge For U.S.](#)
- **Listen to** Michael Krasny and panel of guests on KQED's Forum:
[WikiLeaks, Free Speech and National Security](#)
Michael Krasny and guests talk about whether WikiLeaks has a right to reveal information that some think could affect national security.
- **Read** Rich Phillips, CNN Senior Producer, story about Facebook and Free Speech:
[Facebook gripes protected by free speech, ruling says](#)
A high school girl created a Facebook page criticizing one of her teachers and a Federal Court protected her right to do so.
- **Read** Donal Brown's article on Facebook's 'hate and harassment team.'
[Facebook juggles civility and free speech in policing site](#)
This team spends hours a day erasing offensive words and comments from Facebook.

Additional Resources

- **Visit** [Wikileaks Site](#)
- **Take** the [online quiz](#) on the First Amendment
- **Visit** [Mind/Shift](#) KQED Public Media's educational technology blog.

Context & Critical Issue

There are five parts to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution which states:
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Does the First Amendment define parameters in terms of what is protected as free speech and what has moved beyond the parameters of free speech into the realm of "sensitive information"?

With the advent of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and now WikiLeaks, people are able to access and disseminate more information about each other and our governments than ever before.

- How free can speech be on the Internet?
- What information should be private?
- What should be freely available?

Preview Activities – Option 1

1. Take a poll of students by asking them:
 - Do they have a Facebook account
 - Do they watch videos on YouTube?
 - Have they heard of WikiLeaks?
2. Ask students to free write for 5 minutes on the concept of free speech and what it means to them. Share responses with the class.
3. In pairs invite students to discuss the following quotation:
 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton cited President Obama as believing that *"the more freely information flows, the stronger societies become."*
"Even in authoritarian countries," Clinton said, *"information networks are helping people discover new facts and making governments more accountable."*

Vocabulary Exercise

From [Silencing WikiLeaks A Free Speech Challenge For U.S.](#) by Tom Gjelten, December 9, 2010.

Introduce and discuss key vocabulary before students listen to or read the transcript of Tom Gjelten's report on the challenges facing the Administration in defending free speech worldwide, while trying to prohibit information being released through WikiLeaks. Assemble students in small groups to complete the chart.

Word	Meaning/Example of Usage
controversy	
stakes are high	
disclosure	
classified documents	
internet freedom	
undermining power	
infringement	
cyberattacks	
transparent	
accountable	

Focus Questions

Distribute the transcript of the Tom Gjelten news story or stream the clip for students to listen to in class from [Silencing WikiLeaks A Free Speech Challenge For U.S.](#)

In their small groups ask students to respond to following questions with one student recording each group's ideas.

1. Is it acceptable for government information to be released through WikiLeaks? Was it fair for them to do this?
2. Is it important for the public to know about secret information such as this because it makes the government more transparent and accountable?
3. Can a case be made for withholding information to protect someone?

Post Reading Activities

- Go to the [WikiLeaks site](#) and list the headings of stories that are available.
- Discuss the quote at the top of the page at <http://wikileaks.ch/>
- Read the introductory paragraph on the WikiLeaks site.

"Could become as important a journalistic tool as the Freedom of Information Act" - Time Magazine

Wikileaks is a non-profit media organization dedicated to bringing important news and information to the public. We provide an innovative, secure and anonymous way for independent sources around the world to leak information to our journalists. We publish material of ethical, political and historical significance while keeping the identity of our sources anonymous, thus providing a universal way for the revealing of suppressed and censored injustices.

~~~~~

## Preview Activities - Option 2

### Vocabulary Exercise

From [Facebook gripes protected by free speech, ruling says](#), Rich Phillips, CNN Senior Producer, February 16, 2010. A high school student was suspended for creating a Facebook page criticizing one of her teachers and a Federal Court protected her right to do so.

Before reading the ACLU's article, introduce and discuss key vocabulary from the article with students. In pairs ask students to complete the following vocabulary exercise identifying POS (parts of speech) and definitions.

Review and check answers as a whole class

| Word                | Part of Speech | Definition |
|---------------------|----------------|------------|
| 1. immunity         |                |            |
| 2. protected speech |                |            |
| 3. fundamental      |                |            |
| 4. suspension       |                |            |
| 5. ruling           |                |            |
| 6. lewd             |                |            |
| 7. vulgar           |                |            |

### Focus Questions

In small groups ask students to respond to the following questions:

1. What are you allowed and not allowed to say on social network sites?
2. What words or ideas would you think are not protected under the First Amendment?
3. Have you ever seen or read anything offensive on Facebook/Twitter/YouTube?
4. After reading the ACLU article, do you agree with the Court's ruling?

### Discussion Question - Critical Thinking

What can you do if you see something on Twitter or Facebook that is offensive?

### Post Reading

- Take the First Amendment online quiz at [http://www.teachfirstamendment.org/take\\_quiz.html](http://www.teachfirstamendment.org/take_quiz.html)
- Read Facebook's policy of online behavior

## Online Activity

- Start a class Blog with your students for the semester. Ask students to look for articles on the First Amendment and follow the social networking tab on Mind/Shift, KQED Public Media's educational technology blog at <http://mindshift.kqed.org/>. They should post the articles with their sources on the class Blog. At the end of the semester, students can revisit the site and the issues and look critically at what they have posted and see if they have changed their minds or altered their viewpoints.