

Right to Petition the Government - A Democratic Value We Share

Lesson Plan

People in democratic societies have several ways of getting the attention of government in a peaceful manner. One method is through petition. Petition is the right to ask government at any level to right a wrong or correct a problem.

Of course a petition is only as meaningful as its response, the right to petition allows blocs of public interests to form and to harness voting power in ways that effect change. The right to petition allows citizens to focus government attention on unresolved problems; provide information to elected leaders about unpopular policies; expose misconduct, waste, corruption, and incompetence; and vent popular frustrations without endangering the public order. Petitioning the government today means any nonviolent, legal means of showing encouragement or disapproval of government's action. All public action intended to spur government action, including lobbying, letter-writing, e-mail campaigns, testifying before tribunals, filing lawsuits, supporting referenda, etc., qualifies under the petition clause.

Germans and Americans make good use of their right to petition the government. Students should understand that by taking action, our governments are held more accountable for their decisions and are better servants of the people that elect and pay them.

Materials: One printout of the Right to Petition coloring sheet for each student, and crayons or markers.

Procedure:

1. Write each vocabulary word on the board. Ask students to help define each word and write a simple definition after each word. Ask students to copy each NEW word onto their master vocabulary list and then copy the definitions.

Vocabulary

City Hall - a building where government workers have their offices and work

Citizen - someone who is a legal member of a group

Government - people with the power to make rules and force others to obey the rules

Petition - a paper that citizens may sign that asks their government to do something

Right - freedom or privilege to do something

Rule - tells us how to act and what to do

2. Project the animated cartoon called Right to Petition the Government. Discuss each frame after it has played. Ask students to react to the cartoon when completed. Why did citizens need to petition the government? Ask students to describe reasons why they might want to petition the government.

3. Pass out the Petition coloring sheet and ask students to draw a picture that shows how you may can try to change rules that you think are unfair.

Assessment:

A review of each student's drawing will help you assess whether each student has grasped the concept of Petitioning the Government. Consider reviewing the animation with students who did not depict an appropriate image on their coloring sheet.

