

LAW DAY ★ 2019



Among other important protections such as free speech and freedom of religion, the First Amendment prohibits Congress from enacting laws that restrict the freedom of the press. A free press is a critical right that ensures the American public remains aware of what their government is doing or failing to do. It can uncover ethical wrongdoing, wasteful spending of tax dollars and illegal activities. Some have said, however, that the press sometimes goes too far by exposing private matters, scandalizing minor actions of government officials not for the purpose of speaking truth to power, but only for increasing readership or viewership.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Have the students select one timely topic or current event and have them select a newspaper article about the topic from two different newspapers. Describe the differences between each article. Is one more positive or negative about the topic or event? Does one news source have facts that the other does not include? Which seems to tell the most accurate story and why?
2. Compare the concept of free press in the United States with the concept of a state-run media in another country of their choosing (examples include: Russia, North Korea or Turkey). Develop a “pro” and “con” list for each concept considering how each impacts the knowledge and information of the citizenry.
3. Discuss the landmark United States Supreme Court case of *New York Times v. United States* (1971), regarding the publication of potentially harmful information to the United States government. Ask students to apply the concepts of the *New York Times* case to the criticisms of the website WikiLeaks, which contains a repository of restricted official materials involving spying, war and corruption.

