

LAW DAY ★ 2019



The right to petition the government for a redress of grievances tends to be the least discussed of the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment. However, it is without a doubt a crucial right of the American people. It includes, among other things, lobbying, letter-writing, email or telephone campaigns to elected representatives, filing lawsuits against the government, collecting signatures for ballot initiatives and supporting referendums. In its purest form, it ensures the right of the public to communicate with their elected leaders in one form or another.

Students have exercised their First Amendment rights in many different ways throughout our nation's history. From the 1960s – when students staged walkouts to protest segregation – to 2018 – when students and teachers marched to the Oklahoma Capitol to demand higher wages for teachers and more available funding for classrooms. Each generation adds their voice and actions to bring change in their local communities and beyond.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Direct students to write a letter or email to an elected representative (federal, state or local) about a concern or problem they see. After they've written their letter, ask students to write a paragraph detailing what action they expect their elected representative to take.
2. Ask students to brainstorm issues of social concern and injustice in the local community. Write their issues on the board. After the class generates a list of at least five issues, review the list as a class and ask students to vote on which issues they are most interested. Finally, invite a speaker from a local coalition on the top issue to address how students can get involved in their community.
3. Have students choose one example of how the rights to petition and/or assembly helped to bring about a change in the law that has had a positive effect on people and write an essay explaining what happened historically, how people used petition and/or assembly to accomplish their goals, and what changed. Some examples include: women's suffrage, prohibition, segregation and the Civil Rights Movement or Earth Day.