

At Liberty:
Creativity, Citizenship and the First Amendment
An Interdisciplinary Social Studies and Art Curriculum
About Free Speech

This curriculum is presented by the
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Table of Contents

Curriculum Overview	page 1
Lesson One: What is Free Speech?	page 2
Student Handout: Limitations on Free Speech	page 6
Student Handout: Is Censorship Ever Justified ?	page 7
Student Handout: Texas v. Johnson	page 8
Student Handout: ACLU v. Albuquerque Public School System	page 9
Student Handout: Supreme Court Case Outcomes	page 10
Lesson Two: A Mock Congressional Hearing	page 11
Student Handout: A Mock Congressional Hearing	page 13
Lesson Three: Learning About Site-Specific Art in Preparation for Visiting “Leaning Keep”	page 14
Student Handout: Brian David Dennis and “Leaning Keep”	page 16
Student Handout: Photograph of “Leaning Keep”	page 17
Student Handout: Site-Specific Artwork at Your School	page 18
Lesson Four: Visiting “Leaning Keep” and Meeting the Artist Who Created It	page 19
Lesson Five: An Art Project About Free Speech	page 22
Student Handout: An Art Project About Free Speech	page 25
Student Handout: The Elements of Art	page 26
Academic Standards as Required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education	page 27
Glossary for Civics and Government	page 29
Glossary for Arts and Humanities	page 31
Additional Resources	page 33

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Curriculum Overview

At Liberty is set of five lessons that teach students about the First Amendment in relation to art. After learning about free speech, limited speech, and symbolic speech, students visit “Leaning Keep,” a site-specific installation sculpture at the Philadelphia Art Alliance that addresses the issue of censorship. As part of this visit, students meet with Brian David Dennis, the artist who made the sculpture, and discuss his work with him. Finally, after considering the power of art to express ideas, students make their own art piece about the First Amendment issues they have been studying.

Though doing the whole series of five lessons gives students the most background for their visit to the Philadelphia Art Alliance, doing some of the lessons and not others can still provide a meaningful educational experience. In particular, seeing “Leaning Keep” and meeting with the artist who made it is a unique opportunity that will help students think about free speech and about art in new ways.

If you would like more information about this curriculum or you would like to schedule a visit to see “Leaning Keep,” please contact Mindy Flexer at the Philadelphia Art Alliance, (215) 545-4302, or at mflexer@philartalliance.org.

Lesson One: What is Free Speech?

Students review the First Amendment and learn about the visual arts as symbolic speech. They learn about the specific terms under which free speech is limited. Using these concepts, students debate real Supreme Court cases involving symbolic speech in which free speech has been challenged.

Lesson Two: A Mock Congressional Hearing

In this lesson, students participate in a mock congressional hearing about a bill designed to limit free speech in the interest of national security.

Lesson Three: Learning About Site-Specific Art in Preparation for Visiting “Leaning Keep”

In this lesson, students prepare to visit “Leaning Keep,” a site-specific installation sculpture at the Philadelphia Art Alliance, and to meet with Brian David Dennis, the artist who created it. They gain general background by discussing the way artists use images to express ideas, and learning about installation art. They prepare to see the actual sculpture by reading the artist’s

statement about the work, and generating questions they want to ask him. Finally, students create ideas for site-specific sculptures of their own.

Lesson Four: Visiting “Leaning Keep” at the Philadelphia Art Alliance and Meeting the Artist Who Created It

After a brief introduction to the Art Alliance, students will tour “Leaning Keep” and then meet with the artist who created it. Students may tour other Art Alliance exhibits afterwards. After their Art Alliance visit, students reflect on their experience in a discussion or by writing essays.

Lesson Five: An Art Project About Free Speech

In this lesson, students will learn about using formal means to express ideas. After discussing symbol, metaphor, and the elements of art, they will create a piece of art that expresses their own ideas about freedom of speech, liberty, and citizenship.