

## LESSON PLAN – CAN YOU RUN FOR PRESIDENT FROM PRISON?

**Subject:** Civics and government

**Grade Level:** 6, 7, and 8

### Standards:

Standard 1: Students identify, define, compare, and contrast ideas regarding the nature of government, politics and civic life, and explain how these ideas have influenced contemporary political and legal systems. Students also explain the importance of government, politics and civic engagement in a democratic republic, and demonstrate how citizens participate in civic and political life in their own communities.

USG.1.1 Define civic life, political life, and private life and describe the activities of individuals in each of these spheres.

USG.1.7 Define and provide examples of constitutionalism, rule of law, limited government, and popular sovereignty in the United States Constitution and explain the relationship of these constitutional principles to the protection of the rights of individuals.

Standard 5: Students explain the idea of citizenship in the United States, describe the roles of United States citizens, and identify and explain the rights and responsibilities of United States citizens. They also examine how citizens can participate responsibly and effectively in the civic and political life of the United States.

USG.5.4 Identify and describe the civil and constitutional rights found in the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights and expanded by decisions of the United States Supreme Court; analyze and evaluate landmark cases of the United States Supreme Court concerning civil rights and liberties of individuals.

USG.5.5 Identify when it is constitutional for our government to limit the rights of individuals and explain the reasons why the government would want to do this.

USG.5.7 Explain how citizens in the United States participate in public elections as voters and supporters of candidates for public office.

USG.5.8 Describe opportunities available to individuals to contribute to the well-being of their communities and participate responsibly in the political process at local, state and national levels of government. USG.5.9 Use information from a variety of resources to describe and discuss current American political issues

### Materials Needed:

Students will need access to:

A computer or laptop or a way to show video in class

Students may need headphones

Access to PBS Learning Media

Access to the internet

### Learning Objectives:

- State two rights the Constitution provides for prisoners.
- State one Constitutional right that is lost when someone is in prison.
- Identify rights guaranteed under the First Amendment to the Constitution.
- Identify one situation where prisoners First Amendment rights were denied.
- Identify 3 rights guaranteed to prisoners by the Eighth Amendment.
- Identify the criteria set forth in the Constitution to run for the House of Representatives, the Senate, and for the Presidency.
- Identify one instance of a person running for federal office from prison.
- Identify rights not discussed in the program that the student feels prisoners should be guaranteed.

### Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

Can someone run for president from prison? Believe it or not, it has already happened! And he was from Terre Haute, Indiana. There is nothing in the Constitution to prevent this. The Constitution of the United States and the Amendments provide guarantees for specific rights. Throughout history, these rights have been denied to a variety of groups and/or individuals. This lesson explores the rights of people in prison.

### Body of Lesson:

1. Show video “Can You Run For President From Prison?”
2. Review rights lost in prison
  - a. Right to privacy is lost – they are under almost constant surveillance by guards and electronic video cameras.
  - b. In most states prisoners lose the right to vote.
    - i. In 11 states, the right to vote is lost permanently, even after getting out of prison.
    - ii. In 16 states, prisoners lose the right to vote while in prison and for a period of time after release from prison.
    - iii. In 21 states, prisoners lose the right to vote while in prison, but have that right restored upon release from prison.
    - iv. The District of Columbia, Maine, and Vermont allow the prisoners to continue to have the right to vote.
  - c. Learning Activity

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- i. Use the website below. Have students look up the rights of prisoners and former prisoners in the state where they live or nearby states. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights.aspx>
  - ii. Have students compare the states.
  - iii. Hold a small group discussion. Have the students meet in small groups and discuss the following questions:
    1. Do you think it is fair for the states to have different rules?
    2. Do you think prisoners and former prisoners should have the right to vote?
    3. Should any citizen lose the right to vote? If so, when, and why?
  - iv. Have each group present their thoughts on these questions.
- d. Learning Activity
- i. This activity focuses on the First Amendment and Eighth Amendment rights.
  - ii. First Amendment
    1. “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.”
    2. The American Civil Liberties Union helps prisoners obtain their right to practice religion and helps them understand the boundaries of the First Amendment within the U.S. prison systems.
    3. Read the document found at the link below: “Know Your Rights – Freedom of Religion”
    4. [https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/images/asset\\_upload\\_file78\\_25744.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/images/asset_upload_file78_25744.pdf)
    5. Each student should respond to the following questions.
      - a. What do courts consider when they define a religion?
      - b. A prisoner has a right to exercise religious beliefs; however, that right is balanced against what?
      - c. Please describe at least two examples of when prisoners are allowed to follow special dietary practices related to religion.
  - iii. Eighth Amendment

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1. “Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fine imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.”
  2. Each student should respond to the following questions and submit their answers.
    - a. Under this amendment, guards can inflict pain to prisoners if this is done to restore order. Describe an instance of when this might occur.
    - b. This amendment also protects prisoners from overcrowding in prisons. How would overcrowding be bad for prisoners?
- e. Learning Activity
- i. Discuss the Constitutional requirements to run for Federal Office.
  - ii. Requirements for the House of Representatives
    1. Must be 25 years old
    2. Must be a U.S. citizen for 7 years
    3. Must live in the state where running for office
  - iii. Requirements for the Senate
    1. Must be 30 years old
    2. Must be a U.S. citizen for 9 years
    3. Must live in the state where running for office
  - iv. Requirements for the Presidency
    1. Must be 35 years old
    2. Must be born in the United States
    3. Must live in the U.S. for 14 years prior to running for office
  - v. View this website:  
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/wilson-eugene-debs/>
  - vi. Break into the small groups again for the students to discuss the following questions:
    1. Did you know that Eugene V. Debs ran for President from prison?
    2. Did you know that he was from Terre Haute, Indiana?
    3. Do you think a person should be allowed to run for President or the House of Representatives, or the Senate from prison? Why or why not?
  - vii. Have a class wide discussion where each group can share their thoughts.

### Summary/Closure

Have the class break into small groups again to discuss the following question: *“What rights should all prisoners have?”*

Have each group present their ideas and have a class wide discussion.

### Extension Activities

The PBS Frontline show “Prison State” discusses the approximate 2.3 million people in prison with a disproportionate number coming from cities. The film looks at the cycle of imprisonment in the U.S. It first aired on April 29, 2014. It lasts 1 hour and 24 minutes.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/prison-state/>

Assignment:

1. View film
2. Answer the following questions and submit answers.
  - a. Why are there more prisoners from a few city neighborhoods?
  - b. What can be done to change this?

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