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# Lesson Excerpt: Religious Expression in Public Schools

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## Purpose

Students will gain an understanding that religious expression is a historical factor in the founding of the United States. The tolerance of religious expression is known around the world as a key element in the founding freedoms and ideas of our nation.

## Activity

Students read about and research Religious Freedom Day (see page 2) and consider what it means for religious freedom as expressed by students in public school. Students write a reflection journal entry or essay on this or a related issue such as how it affects them individually or as a whole school, what it means to them, and why it is important. How does this tie in or relate to the department of education documents and the issues and rights it addresses.

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Resource: *America's Heritage: An Adventure in Liberty*

High School

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Download the Free Lesson

[High School Lesson\\*](#)

\*To download the entire American Heritage Themes lesson plan, you must sign up for a free membership with American Heritage Education Foundation.

## Activity Location

America's Heritage: An Adventure in Liberty (HS Edition), Religious Expression in Public Schools Unit, pp. 167-184.

## Other Resources

[American Heritage Education Foundation Bookstore](#)

[The Founding](#)

[American Heritage Education Foundation](#)

# Religious Freedom Day

## January 16<sup>th</sup>

In 1993, President George H. W. Bush with Congress designated January 16th as National Religious Freedom Day, recognizing the First Amendment right of the Bill of Rights that provides for the American's freedom to believe and worship as he or she wishes. Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush have also recognized and proclaimed Religious Freedom Day throughout their presidencies. In his 2002 proclamation, President George W. Bush states:

“Religious freedom is a cornerstone of our Republic, a core principle of our Constitution, and a fundamental human right. Many of those who first settled in America, such as Pilgrims, came for the freedom of worship and belief that this new land promised. ...Our Founders constitutionally limited our Federal Government's capacity to interfere with religious belief by prohibiting the Congress from passing any law ‘respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.’ These constitutional limits have allowed the flourishing of faith across our country, which greatly blesses our land....

...I urge all Americans to observe this day by asking for the blessing and protection of Almighty God for our Nation, and to engage in appropriate ceremonies and activities in their homes, schools, and places of worship as a sign of our resolve to protect and preserve our religious freedom.”

President George W. Bush  
Proclamation of Religious Freedom Day  
January 16, 2002  
[www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

### **Additional Reading:**

“Religion and the Public Schools: State of Freedom or Fear?”

Family Research Council

[www.frc.org](http://www.frc.org)

Issue No.: 245

by: Miriam Moore & Crystal Roberts

May 2, 2006

The paper summarizes student religious rights, including rights under the U.S. Constitution and the Equal Access Act of 1984. It also answers frequently asked questions regarding student religious rights, such as whether students are allowed to share their faith with classmates, wear religious articles, or pray during school hours or at a graduation ceremony. The paper also discusses released time education, celebration of religious holidays in schools, and teaching about religion.