



THE IDEA OF AMERICA™

Visual Literacy Activity

Background Information

Ever since the American Revolution launched our nation's experiment in self-government, it has been the responsibility of citizens to help decide the direction the country should take. This is the source of enduring debate among Americans. Every issue in our nation's history represents an attempt to strike a balance between competing sets of values that all Americans hold dear: Law vs. Ethics, Unity vs. Diversity, Freedom vs. Equality, and Private Wealth vs. Commonwealth. Since the nation is constantly evolving, the "Great Debate" is a task with no end.

Activity Description

This analysis process can be used for any images or descriptions of historical events. Using the framework of the Great Debate, students examine major events in American history and determine how different generations of citizens chose to balance these values. These historical events and issues, as depicted in images, reflect the debates Americans engage in to this day.

Duration approximately 50 minutes

Value Tension Focus Freedom vs. Equality, Unity vs. Diversity, Common Wealth vs. Private Wealth, Law vs. Ethics

Objectives Students will:

- identify the values that frame the ongoing debates taking place within the nation.
- analyze images depicting historical events where a particular value or values are the subject of debate.
- evaluate historical events and engage in civil discourse using the value tension framework.

Skills analyze images; identify the Great Debate; take notes; evaluate historical decisions

Instructional Strategy Steps

1. Introduce students to the construct of American history as an enduring debate centered on competing shared sets of values. Distribute a copy of the Summary of the Great Debate and Value Tensions to each student. Provide students a few minutes to read the handout, then review the value tensions, answering any questions students may have.
2. Inform students that they will be given primary source images depicting historical events. They will need to analyze those images to determine the value most exemplified by the event. Explain that as they engage in the analysis process they need to answer the following questions:
 - What is the historical event?



THE IDEA OF AMERICA™

Visual Literacy Activity

- What values are being debated?
 - What position, if any, does the creator of the primary source take?
 - What similar issues are being debated today?
3. Distribute the Image Analysis Graphic Organizer. Using one of the images provided here as an example, model the analysis process for the class and answer any questions students may have.
 4. Assign students to small groups. Depending on the level of your students, assign each group one or all of the remaining images. Provide each student one Image Analysis Graphic Organizer for each image they are assigned. Allow time for groups to analyze their images.
 5. When all groups have completed their analysis, ask representatives from the groups to share their findings.

Printable Materials

Summary of the Great Debate and Value Tensions
Image Analysis Chart
Image Resources

Extension Have students identify an issue currently being debated in American politics or the news media and locate an image depicting the controversy. Students should use the Image Analysis Chart to analyze the image.

Additional Resources

The Virtual Republic <http://ourvirtualrepublic.org> Debate current issues online, develop policy solutions, and get involved in a cause.

Other Classroom Products & Programs <http://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/teach> Enrich your curriculum and inspire students with a variety of history resources for the classroom.



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Summary of the Great Debate and Value Tensions

Values	The Great Debate
Unity vs. Diversity	We celebrate our unity as one nation, but we also cherish that we come from numerous cultures, ethnicities, religions, and regions. How do these values sometimes clash?
Private Wealth vs. Common Wealth	We contribute our labor and skills to the economy, to accumulate individual wealth and property. But we also share resources for the good of the nation— infrastructure, public education, national security... How do we keep both in balance?
Law vs. Ethics	The United States is a nation governed by the rule of law. Yet we recognize that sometimes the law is unjust, and celebrate those who strive toward personal moral codes of right and wrong. How does our nation decide when to follow law, and when to follow ethics?
Freedom vs. Equality	Total freedom tramples the equality of others. But total equality tramples individual rights too. How do we find a balance?



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Image Analysis Chart

What is the event?	
What values are being debated?	
What position, if any, does the creator of the primary source take?	
For historical events: What similar issues are being debated today? For current events: What perspectives on this issue are currently in debate?	



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"Landing at Ellis Island," 1902. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-12595].



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“The Statue of Liberty, New York,” Carol M. Highsmith, ca. 1980–2006. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-HS503-3066].



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“SA500 at New York Stock Exchange.” © 2011 José Maria Silveira Neto. From Flickr with Creative Commons License 2.0.



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FIRST **1** DIVISION
CAMP FULTON, KENTUCKY

SECOND DIVISION
CAMP HAVAN, TEXAS

THIRD DIVISION
CAMP PAUL, ARIZONA

FOURTH DIVISION
CAMP BRACK, TEXAS

FIFTH DIVISION
CAMP FORTSON, GEORGIA

SIXTH DIVISION
CAMP FORTSON, KANSAS

—Otho Cushing
—Capt. A.S., U.S.A.

INFANTRY DIVISIONS.

ENLIST FOR
Infantry. Cavalry. Field Artillery. Engineers. Signal Corps
Quartermaster Corps. Medical Department or Coast Artillery
Air Service. Tank Corps. Motor Transport. Ordnance & Construction Division.

APPLY

"First division, regulars - Infantry divisions - Enlist for infantry, cavalry, field artillery [...] / Otho Cushing, Capt. A.S., U.S.A." Otho Cushing. (Washington, D.C.: Engineer Reproduction plant, U.S. Army, 1919.) Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZC4-9997].



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“Am I Not a Man and a Brother? anti-slavery broadside,” ca. 1835.
The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.



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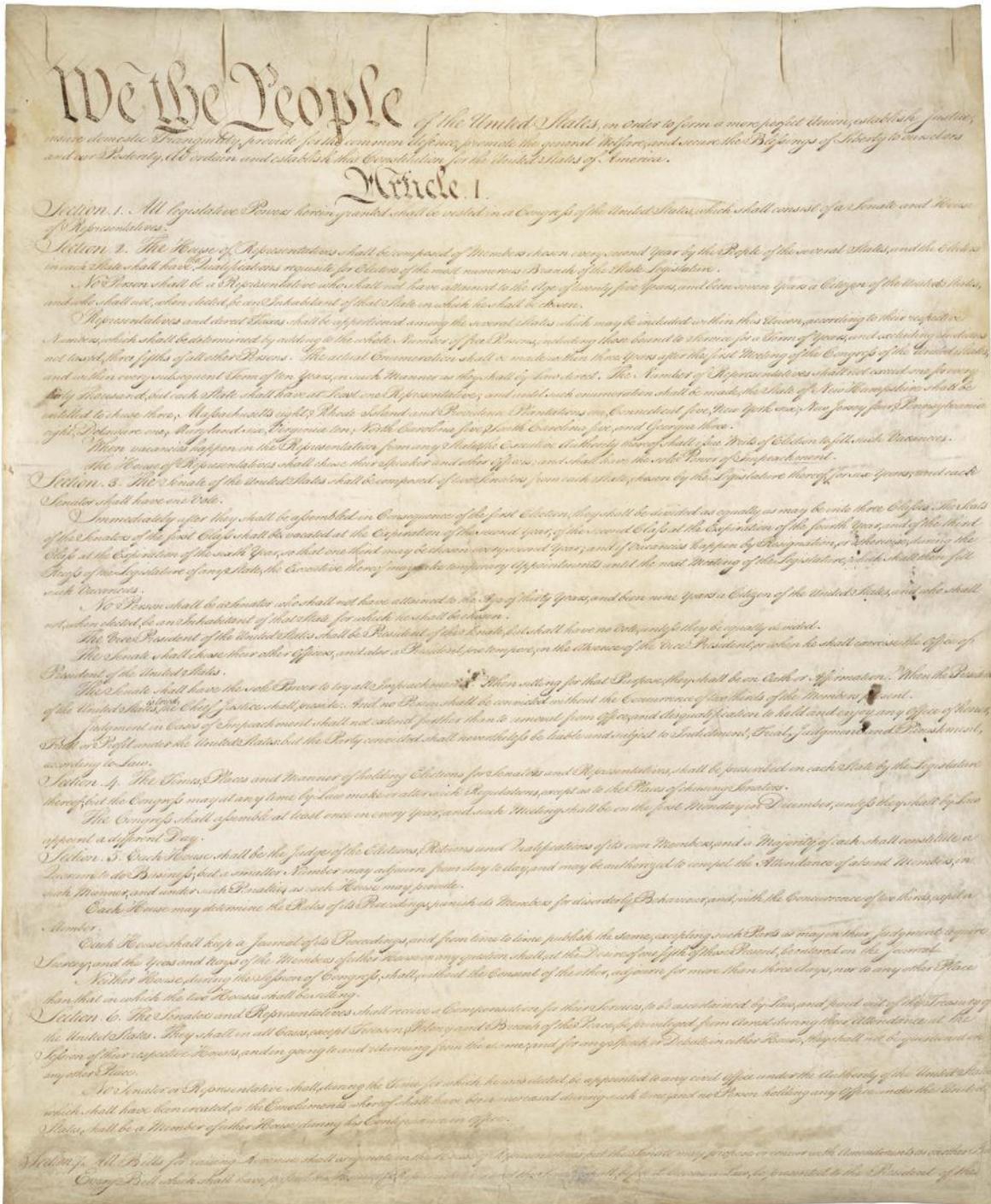


"Suffragists Mrs. Stanley McCormick and Mrs. Charles Parker..." April 22, 1913. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-93552].



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The U.S. Constitution (first page). National Archives and Records Administration.



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"[African American demonstrators outside the White House, with signs "We demand the right to vote, everywhere" and signs protesting police brutality against civil rights demonstrators in Selma, Alabama] / WKL." Warren K. Leffler, March 12, 1965. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-DIG-ds-05267].