

Topic:

Reading, Writing, and
Religion: Role-Play Panel
Discussion

Time:

3 class periods

Historical**Period:**

The present

Core:

Utah 6100 - 0203
US I 6120 - 0804 & 0602
US II 6250 - 0102
Gov. 6210 - 0201 & 0202

Objectives:

1. Students will understand the two aspects of freedom of religion: (1) the Free Exercise Clause and (2) the Establishment Clause.
2. Students will realize the conflicts faced daily by educators in protecting and respecting both aspects of “freedom of religion.”

Procedure:

1. Teacher should review “Teaching Strategies” and “Role Playing and Simulations” at the beginning of this manual.
2. Write on the board:
“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”
3. Students should examine both phrases and discuss their importance, their potential conflict(s), and their meaning.
4. Explain to students about role-playing. Distribute background material and description of the problem, Handout 1.
5. Distribute descriptions of various roles to individual students, Handout 2. Give them the rest of the period/ school day to “research” the role; discuss with friends and parents the attitudes and opinions of their particular role.
6. The teacher’s role is to act as moderator and facilitator of the discussion. He/she should ask key questions to encourage interaction among students. No one student should monopolize too much time, and students should be allowed to speak without interruption. The basic teacher text is the U. S. Constitution.
The beginning question for each “character” is:
Would you be comfortable if that prayer were said in that setting?
7. Other questions you may want to ask to stimulate comments and discussion can be found in Handout 3.

Handouts/Worksheets:

1. Background in Alma, Utah
2. Panel Members
3. Discussion Questions

Author: Robert Crane

INTRODUCTION

The internal conflict of the Constitutional Amendment guaranteeing all of us “freedom of religion” will always be a stimulating and controversial issue in Utah. Our state was denied statehood for many years because the federal government could not accept the Mormon pioneers’ definition of “freedom of religion.” This lesson separates and explains for students the two clauses in the freedom of religion guarantee. Also, it uses a role play situation to help students grasp the difficulty of interpreting the Constitution fairly and appropriately for all Americans.

HANDOUT 1

ALMA, UTAH BACKGROUND AND SETTING

- Time:** Today
- Place:** Alma, Utah, second largest city in Utah, once a small rural town, but today a growing urban area.
- Background:** In the past two years, sixteen youths, mostly boys, have been killed in this community. The police are baffled about the murders. They have no clues or suspects. All the young people were either junior high or high school age youth. Most of them were good, outstanding young people in their schools. The community is in a state of fear and constant mourning.
- Problem:** Jamie Brown is the seventeenth victim. The town is again in a state of shock. Jamie was a senior in high school. Not much is known about the circumstances of the murder. All the school seems to know is that an outstanding student and great athlete on the school's football team was killed. The entire school and community are saddened by his passing.
- Jamie's father is a minister of a local church and asks that a memorial service be held in the school during the school day to accommodate the large numbers of people. He also wishes to offer a very short prayer at this service for his son. The prayer says basically, "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence on Thee and earnestly beseech you to bless the soul of our dear departed Jamie Brown in the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord."

WOULD YOU BE COMFORTABLE IF THAT PRAYER WERE SAID ON THIS OCCASION?

PANEL MEMBERS

Junior High School Student

This prayer really bothers her. She believes it is against the Constitution. (Where in the Constitution does it say that?)

University of Utah Student

He wants to know about all people. The prayer doesn't bother him because he wants to pray, and these circumstances require it.

High School Student

She is a senior who is dead-set against the prayer. She is not of the same faith as most of the people in the community, and she believes that religion has no business in the school.

Chair of the Utah State Board of Education

He feels that although the Supreme Court ruled in 1962 in *Engle v. Vitale* that school prayer is unconstitutional in the public school, there is still leeway to allow this prayer this once for an important memorial service. So he gives his stamp of approval for this service in the public schools.

American Civil Liberties Union Lawyer

She has been noted for taking cases to court for clients with situations that the ACLU felt violated the free exercise and establishment clauses of the Constitution. She vehemently opposes this prayer and service because of the Constitution and in order to protect the religious views of the minority over the majority in the community.

Mother and Father

The mother and father are Jewish, and he is a lawyer about 40 years old who can't go along with the prayer for Constitutional reasons. He also feels it excluded him from the prayer because of the words ". . . In the Name of Jesus Christ Our Lord." (The moderator may want to ask if he'd still object if we dropped that last part and said, ". . . In the Name of Our Lord"?)

High School History Teacher

He favors the memorial service and prayer. After all, students don't have to go; they could stay in class, sluff to the 7-11 store, go to the library, or any number of options.

High School Student

A sophomore in high school who feels that maybe it is wrong to say the prayer, but she'll go anyway and be tolerant of others and their beliefs.

High School History Teacher

She feels that school assemblies are for everyone, that this assembly is just for some of the students, and that the rest are left out because of personal beliefs. She appeals to the school board not to have the assembly. It puts her in an awkward position. She is about 35 years old and is a popular teacher.

Baptist Minister

He feels that prayer should extend out of the church and into the community, the school, and the home. He favors not less prayer, but more prayer.

Unitarian Church Minister

He feels that the service should be in a church, not in the school. He feels that the Founding Fathers built a wall between church and state, and we must maintain that separation. Public prayer in public school has no place in America.

Federal Judge

He is a Federal Judge who feels that the Supreme Court was wrong in 1962 when it ruled in *Engle v. Vitale* and overruled the laws of 41 states that allowed school prayer. He would allow the service, but feels he would probably be overruled by a higher court.

Utah Senator

He is in favor of bringing prayer back into the public schools. He thinks the Bill of Rights is not to protect just minorities, but everyone. It should be up to the local community to decide these issues, not the federal government in Washington.

Attorney

He is the founder of a respected law firm and a well-known attorney who believes that just this once, especially because of the circumstances, we should allow the prayer. But be careful because “once you allow the camel to get his nose under the tent, eventually you have his whole body.” Let’s do it just this once.

Journalist

A Pulitzer Prize winning journalist for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, she believes that the First Amendment should be enforced to the letter and no exceptions should be made: “NO prayer in public schools!”

HANDOUT 3

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the United States Constitution say about separation of church and state?
2. What does the Utah State Constitution say?
3. What is wrong (or appropriate) about having the service in the school?
4. Is anything wrong with the prayer? Would a Hindu or a Buddhist be comfortable with the prayer and/or the service? What about an atheist? An agnostic?
5. How do YOU differentiate between the song “God Bless America” and the prayer “God Bless Jamie Brown”?
6. Does the Bill of Rights apply to the individual states? By what authority? Fourteenth Amendment or Supreme Court decisions?
7. Can a city put up a Christmas display, have a Christmas tree, display a nativity scene in a local park using taxpayers’ money? With private money?