American Government  
The Bill of Rights: Part II

The founding fathers believed people are born with certain inalienable⁴ rights. These are rights we are born with that no one can take away. To protect these rights, they created 10 amendments to the Constitution known as the Bill of Rights. The first 8 amendments cover fundamental² rights and freedoms of every citizen. The 9th Amendment forbids the government to limit freedoms and rights not covered in the Constitution. The 10th Amendment limits the power of the federal government to the Constitution.

Three of the most important amendments from the Bill of Rights are listed below. Beside the amendment is a description of the right that it protects.

Amendment I – Freedom of Speech

In some countries, people cannot always say what they are thinking. Under United States law, people are not punished for speaking their opinions. Newspaper editors³ can print whatever opinions they want. They can even write criticisms of the government. A writer summarizing the philosopher Voltaire’s beliefs once wrote, “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” This idea of protecting free speech helps strengthen our democracy.

Amendment VI – Trial by Jury

In the United States, people accused of a crime are innocent until proven guilty. They must have a trial to determine if they are guilty. This amendment guarantees everyone’s right to a trial by a jury. A jury is made up of men and women from all different backgrounds. The jury listens to evidence⁴ in a case.

1 inalienable – cannot be given away or taken away  
2 fundamental – basic and necessary  
3 editors – people in charge or a newspaper or magazine  
4 evidence – information and facts that help prove something or make you believe that something is true
The jury decides whether a person is guilty or innocent of a crime. The person’s fate does not rest with just one judge.

**Amendment VIII – No Cruel and Unusual Punishment**

Have you ever heard the phrase “cruel and unusual punishment”? That means punishment that is so terrible that not even criminals deserve it. This amendment protects people accused of crimes in the United States. They can’t be tortured or punished in painful ways. They can’t be treated in cruel or unusual ways that hurt them.

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5 *fate* – destiny, or what happens to someone because of things they cannot control
1. What makes sure that people can speak their opinions in the U.S.?
   a. The Fifth Amendment  
   b. The Declaration of Independence  
   c. The First Amendment  
   d. The Fourth Amendment

2. Why does the author describe three of the ten amendments to the reader?
   a. because they are the three least important amendments  
   b. because they are the only three amendments still in effect  
   c. to discuss some important rights covered by the Bill of Rights  
   d. to explain why some of the amendments have become outdated

3. Why does the author most likely include the quote, “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it”?
   a. to show how foreign governments ensure rights  
   b. to explain the difference between philosophy and law  
   c. to show how important free speech is to people  
   d. to explain why some people opposed the amendments

4. Read the following sentences: “In the United States, people accused of a crime are innocent until proven guilty. They must have a trial to determine if they are guilty.”
   The word determine means
   a. to reach a decision  
   b. to prevent something  
   c. to give a punishment  
   d. to make a speech

5. What is the main idea of this passage?
   a. The Constitution decides what powers the government has.  
   b. The Bill of Rights protects important rights and freedoms.  
   c. Early Americans were concerned about how courts would work.  
   d. The Bill of Rights is mostly about limiting the power of the government.
6. What does the 10th Amendment do?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

7. In the United States, could a reporter write something negative about the president? Why or why not?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Being able to say your opinion is protected in the United States, ________ in some countries you can get in trouble for saying what you think.

a. finally
b. for example
c. before
d. but

9. Read the following sentence.

The 8th Amendment prevents people from being tortured in the United States.

Answer the questions below based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

1. What? the 8th Amendment

2. What does the 8th Amendment do? ________________________________________

3. Where? ________________________________________________________________
10. **Vocabulary Word:** forbid: to order that something not be done.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: ________________________________

________________________________________
Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 830

Featured Text Structure: Enumerative – the writer includes a list, giving examples of something. This text structure is often combined with cause/effect or problem/solution

Passage Summary: The Bill of Rights was added to the United States Constitution to protect things like people’s freedom. Three of the amendments in the Bill of Rights address freedom of speech, trial by jury, and cruel or unusual punishment.

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   a. The Fifth Amendment
   b. The Declaration of Independence
   c. The First Amendment
   d. The Fourth Amendment

2. Why does the author describe three of the ten amendments to the reader?
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6. What does the 10th Amendment do?
   
   **Suggested answer:** The 10th Amendment limits the power of the federal government to what is already written in the Constitution.

7. In the United States, could a reporter write something negative about the president? Why or why not?
   
   **Suggested answer:** Yes, because the first amendment protects freedom of speech.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.
   
   Being able to say your opinion is protected in the United States, ________ in some countries you can get in trouble for saying what you think.

   a. finally  
   b. for example  
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   d. but

9. Read the following sentence.

   **The 8th Amendment prevents people from being tortured in the United States.**

   Answer the questions below based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

   1. What?  the 8th Amendment
   2. What does the 8th Amendment do?  prevents people from being tortured
   3. Where?  in the United States
10. **Vocabulary Word**: forbid: to order that something not be done.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.