



Equally Unequal: Harrison Bergeron by Kurt Vonnegut

Equality, Fairness, and the Amendments



Polly Base, Lindsey Link

Published by K20 Center

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Grade Level	9th – 10th Grade	Time Frame	200
Subject	English/Language Arts, Social Studies	Duration	4
Course	American Literature, U.S. Government, U.S. History		

Essential Question

Do the amendments to the Constitution ensure all people living in America are given the basic rights of equality?

Summary

Students will read and analyze the short story, "Harrison Bergeron," by American writer Kurt Vonnegut. Students will consider how the amendments to the constitution promote equality. They will discuss different claims, which support the amendments, and discuss evidence or lack of evidence to explain how the amendments affect society. Students will examine the structure of the amendments and write their own amendments that they hope or think will improve society for all people.

Snapshot

Engage

Students participate in a Four Corners strategy focused on the important statement, "Fairness is more important than freedom."

Explore

Students engage in an I Notice, I Wonder strategy in regard to the U.S. Constitutional Amendments.

Explain

Students read and Why-Light the short story "Harrison Bergeron."

Extend

Students consider evidence in support of, or against the validity of, constitutional amendments by participating in a Claim Cards strategy in small groups.

Evaluate

Students write fair amendments to the constitution, which contribute to the betterment of society.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts (Grade 9)

9.3.R.5: Students will evaluate textual evidence to determine whether a claim is substantiated or unsubstantiated.

9.7.W.1: Students will create a variety of multimodal content to engage specific audiences.

9.7.W.2: Students will create engaging visual and/or multimedia presentations, using a variety of media forms to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence for diverse audiences.

Attachments

- [Agree or Disagree Argument—Equally Unequal - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Agree or Disagree Argument—Equally Unequal - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Agree or Disagree Argument—Equally Unequal.docx](#)
- [Agree or Disagree Argument—Equally Unequal.pdf](#)
- [Claim Cards—Equally Unequal - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Claim Cards—Equally Unequal - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Claim Cards—Equally Unequal.docx](#)
- [Claim Cards—Equally Unequal.pdf](#)
- [Four Corners Activity—Equally Unequal - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Four Corners Activity—Equally Unequal - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Four Corners Activity—Equally Unequal.docx](#)
- [Four Corners Activity—Equally Unequal.pdf](#)
- [Harrison Bergeron Short Story—Equally Unequal - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Harrison Bergeron Short Story—Equally Unequal - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Harrison Bergeron Short Story—Equally Unequal.docx](#)
- [Harrison Bergeron Short Story—Equally Unequal.pdf](#)
- [Lesson Slides—Equally Unequal.pptx](#)
- [Table of Current Amendments—Equally Unequal - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Table of Current Amendments—Equally Unequal - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Table of Current Amendments—Equally Unequal.docx](#)
- [Table of Current Amendments—Equally Unequal.pdf](#)

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- "Harrison Bergeron" short story (attached; one per student)
- U.S. Constitutional Amendments (linked; one per pair of students)
- Table of Current U.S. Constitutional Amendments (attached; one per student)
- Four Corners signs (attached)
- Claim Cards (attached; one set per group)
- Agree or Disagree Argument (attached) (optional)
- Highlighters
- Markers
- Chart paper
- Sticky notes (two different colors per group)
- Computers
- Internet access

20 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note

Place signs labeled **Strongly Agree**, **Agree**, **Disagree**, and **Strongly Disagree** around the room prior to class. Use the **Four Corners** attachment to print signs, or make your own signs, if you prefer.

Use the attached **Lesson Slides**.

Show **slide 3** to begin the lesson. Take a moment to read aloud the essential question: "Do the amendments to the U.S. Constitution ensure all people living in America are given the basic rights of equality?"

Show **slide 4** to review the learning objectives for the lesson.

Show **slide 5**. Watch the short clip titled, [What is Equality?](#) Stop the video at the 35-second mark. Ask students to discuss their opinions of the concepts of equality and fairness.

Embedded video

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=z0sCjdhW5tU>

Show **slide 6**. Share the directions for the instructional strategy, [Four Corners](#).

Show **slide 7**. Ask students to consider the statement, "Fairness is more important than freedom."

Explain that *fairness* is defined as "treating people according to their needs, free from self-interest, prejudice, or favoritism."

Give students a few minutes to form their opinions about the statement, ask them to move to one of the four corners in the room: **Strongly Agree**, **Agree**, **Disagree**, or **Strongly Disagree**.

Show **slide 8**. Have groups discuss their opinions about the statement and choose a spokesperson to share out their thoughts.

Show **slide 9**. After each representative has spoken, give students who may have changed their opinions an opportunity to switch groups. Ask students who change their groups to explain their reasons for changing.

Teacher's Note

If teaching a hybrid course, have students write their opinions and submit the attached **Agree or Disagree Argument** handout, where students write their opinions. If teaching face-to-face, you may also want to have students put their opinions in writing.

30 minutes

Explore

Display **slide 10**. Explain the instructional strategy, [I Notice, I Wonder](#). Share the [U.S. Constitutional Amendments](#) (or pass out the **Table of Current U.S. Constitutional Amendments** handout).

Show **slide 11**. Pass out sticky notes to each group (two different colors for each group).

Instruct students to partner up and discuss their observations regarding the structure of the different amendments. What do they notice? What do they wonder? Remind students to examine the amendments for similarities and/or patterns and include those observations on their sticky notes.

Teacher's Note

This activity may require that you highlight specific examples such as the repeated use of negating words like "no" and "not" as well as positive words like "shall" and "shall have."

As a class, discuss the observations students have made. Remind students they will be using what they noticed later in the lesson.

Display **slide 12**. Share the film *2081*, a [video](#) adaptation of the story, "Harrison Bergeron." The film is about 26 minutes long.

Ask students to identify what types of censorship or violations of human rights, based on our current amendments to the Constitution, they noticed in the video.

50 minutes

Explain

Show **slide 13**. Introduce the author, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

Distribute copies of the short story handout, "**Harrison Bergeron**," and highlighters for students.

Show **slide 14**. Have students listen to a portion of the audio version of "[Harrison Bergeron](#)." The audio version takes 15:38 minutes. About 5–7 minutes into the reading (choose an appropriate stopping place), stop and discuss the current constitutional amendments in relation to the amendments mentioned in the story.

Ask students to discuss the following:

- Define "amendment" based on their prior knowledge.
- Recall the number of amendments we currently have to the constitution.
- Recall any of the amendments to the constitution from the previous activity.

Teacher's Note

The definition of an amendment is a change, addition, or rephrasing of something, most often with the intention of improvement. An example of an amendment are the changes made to the U.S. Constitution.

Show **slide 15** with the list of the 27 amendments to the Constitution and brief explanations for each. You can also distribute the attached **Table of Current U.S. Constitutional Amendments** handout, if you have not done so already. Ask students the following discussion questions:

- Which amendment do you think improved society most? Why?
- Based on the first paragraph of the story, how many amendments had been added to the constitution from the present to 2081, the date of the story?

Teacher's Note

This would be a time to include math in the lesson by having students answer this ratio question: Between 1776 and 1961, 185 years, only 23 amendments were ratified. However, based on the information provided in the story, in the next 120 years, 1961–2081, 190 amendments were added. What is the ratio of years to amendments in the first 185 years versus the next 120 years? Allow time for students to discuss the implications this would have on the United States if we actually added that many amendments to the Constitution.

Show **slide 16**. Introduce the instructional strategy, [Why-Lighting](#). Have students highlight instances of unfairness and violations of rights reflected in the print copy of the story. Ask them to write in the margins of the handout what rights are being taken away and why this is unfair.

Show **slide 17** and ask students to keep in mind the concept of "fairness" as they listen. Remind students that "fairness" is defined as treating people according to their needs, free from self-interest, prejudice, or favoritism.

Show **slide 18**. Ask students to continue Why-Lighting as they listen to the story and read along.

Return to **slide 14** and continue to play the audio for your students as they follow along with the rest of the story.,

On finishing the story, have a class discussion on the issues of unfairness that are displayed in the story.

- Were the amendments good for the people?
- What basic human rights were being violated to create a "truly equal" society?

Teacher's Note

You might choose to have an [Exit Ticket](#) at the end of this portion of the lesson asking the students their opinion of the society of Harrison Bergeron. Do they think that it is the right way to live with the handicaps imposed by the Handicapper General, so everyone is the "same"?

50 minutes

Extend

Show **slide 19** and reread the essential question, "Do the amendments to the U.S. Constitution ensure all people are given the basic rights of equality?"

Teacher's Note

Remind students that equality is the state of being equal in rights, status, advantages, etc., whereas fairness is free from self-interest, prejudice, or favoritism as we discussed in the beginning of the lesson.

You may print a set of the Claim Cards and pass them out to each group to work at their own pace, or you may choose to use them one at a time to keep the groups working at the same pace. Instruct each group to discuss the evidence that supports or refutes each claim using their own prior knowledge to generate examples and complete informal research during the discussion. Evidence must come from .gov, .edu, or .org sites.

Show **slide 20**. Introduce the instructional strategy [Claim Cards](#).

Have students split up into groups of five (5). Have each group member select one of the Claim Cards to discuss. Explain to the students that these claims are based on [Amendments to the Constitution](#).

The Claim Card statements are on **slides 21–25**.

Claim Card Statements:

- Peacefully protesting in America is legal and safe (**slide 21**).
- States in America provide all people with the same rights (**slide 22**).
- People in America have a voice regarding political decisions (**slide 23**).
- The Constitution is not used against people (**slide 24**).
- Citizens are protected from cruel and unusual punishment (**slide 25**).

Show **slide 26** after all student groups have discussed their Claim Cards. Have them create a [Padlet](#) video that includes the following:

1. A claim statement that the group believes is the best claim for the essential question;
2. An explanation of why their claim is the best;
3. Evidence to support this.

Teacher's Note: Claim Statements

The claim statements may spark some debate for both sides of the issue. Encourage groups to come to a consensus, but be open to allowing groups to break into two opposing sides as long as they can provide evidence. Remind students of the rules of respectful debate.

50 minutes

Evaluate

Show **slide 27**. Instruct students to review their sticky note results from earlier in the lesson. Have them share out observations they made of the structure of the amendments.

Show **slide 28**. Ask students the following question: How can the U.S. Constitution be improved?

As a class, brainstorm some ways the U.S. Constitution should be changed. Have a student from each group write responses on the board or a piece of chart paper. Instruct students to choose a change they feel is important and write an amendment to the Constitution.

Show **slide 29**. Share with students the two available options: (1) write a 28th amendment and a [Claim, Evidence, Reasoning](#) paragraph, or (2) create a multimedia presentation.

Advise students to ensure that the new amendment include the following:

- It is fair for all people.
- It improves society.
- Include evidence for the need and importance of the amendment.

Instruct them to include in the C-E-R paragraph the following:

- New amendment
- Claim
- Evidence that this amendment is necessary
- Reasoning explaining how the amendment is fair and will help society

Instruct them to include in the multimedia presentation the following:

- New amendment
- Sixty-second presentation including pictures, artwork, music, text, or video displaying why the amendment is necessary, how it is fair, and how it will help society.

Resources

- CommonLit, Inc. (2018, Mar. 23). What is equality? [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0sCjdhW5tU>
- CommonLit, Inc. (n.d.). Harrison Bergeron. [Website]. <https://www.commonlit.org/en/library?searchQuery=Harrison%20Bergeron>
- FindLaw. (n.d.). U. S. Constitutional amendments. <https://constitution.findlaw.com/amendments.html>
- JedmondFish. (2019, July 26). "Harrison Bergeron" Audiobook - Kurt Vonnegut Jr. [Audio]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uP_YwwwlScU&t=11s
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Bell ringers and exit tickets. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/125>
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Claim cards. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/160>
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Claim, evidence, reasoning. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/156>
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Four corners. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/138>
- K20 Center. (n.d.) I notice, I wonder. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/180>
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Padlet. Tech tool. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/1077>
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Why-lighting. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/128>
- Tuttle, C. & Halvorssen, T. (2009). *2081* [Video]. Moving Picture Institute and Passing Lane Films. <https://www.teaching2081.org/watch-the-film>
- WNET-TV/PBS. (2018, July 28). *Kurt Vonnegut* [Photograph]. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kurt_Vonnegut_1972.jpg
- YourDictionary. (n.d.). Your dictionary. <https://www.yourdictionary.com/amendment>