Nothing but the Truth – Unit focus on free speech

**OVERVIEW**

After reading the novel *Nothing But the Truth*, students discuss the protagonist Phillip and his right to free speech as well as their own rights. Students examine various Websites to research First Amendment rights, especially as they relate to the situation in the novel. After their research, students compose a position statement regarding their opinion of whether Philip’s rights were violated then work with small groups to strengthen their statements and supporting evidence. Groups present position statement and supporting evidence to the whole class and debate Philip’s civil rights as a culminating activity.

**STUDENT OBJECTIVES**

Students will

* analyze the theme of a novel using both personal opinion and factual information.
* engage with the novel by making personal connections to its themes.
* use the Internet for research.
* use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information in support of an opinion.
* compose a position statement.
* synthesize their position statements with those of two to four other students.
* present, explain, and defend their position statements.

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**Session One**

1. In their journals or loose leaf, have students respond to the following prompt as they enter the room, “Using your own experience and the events in *Nothing But the Truth*, list the rights you feel you should, but do not have, as a young adult.”
2. Divide students into small groups and give each group a piece of chart paper and some markers. Alternatively, students can gather their responses on overhead transparencies.
3. Ask groups to discuss their responses to the prompt, compiling a list of their rights or rights they think they should have on the chart paper. Give students about five minutes for this work.
4. Bring the class together and ask representatives from each group can share their lists, either posting their list on the wall or sharing it with an overhead projector.
5. Using the lists generated as a class, ask students to write for a few minutes about which of the rights they listed are violated in Philip’s situation.
6. After allowing students to gather their ideas, ask students to discuss Philip’s situation and their opinion of his rights (about 20 minutes or so).
7. To stimulate discussion, consider sharing these quotations from the novel:

Philip: “It’s a free country.”   
Dr. Palleni: “Nothing is free.” (74-5)  
  
Dr. Palleni: “If a student creates a disturbance in a classroom, that’s breaking a rule. An important rule. Students cannot break—cannot make a disturbance in a classroom.” (83)  
  
Mrs. Narwin: “He’s a student. I’m a teacher. Hands aren’t meant to be even.” (177)

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**Session Two**

1. Explain that during this session you will look for reference material and research material relating to the the issues of free speech raised in *Nothing But the Truth*.
2. Begin the session with basic information about free speech, pointing first to the [Bill of Rights](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/bill_of_rights.html) and then to the information from the [handout on Supreme Court cases regarding free speech in schools](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson394/Cases.pdf).
3. Point students to the [First Amendment Websites](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson394/NBTT-Web.html). If you want to allow students to continue research outside of class, provide them a copy of the Web page or ask them to copy the addresses into their notebooks.
4. Ask students to use the [First Amendment Websites](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson394/NBTT-Web.html) to find as much information as they can about rights for young adults, focusing on free speech rights related to schools. Depending on your students’ Internet capabilities, you may want to narrow the search further.
5. Ask students should keep track of the important points found in their research, such as Supreme Court cases, examples from schools throughout the country, public opinion, and so forth.
6. If desired, explain that students can cut and paste relevant information from Web pages to a Word document, explaining why the information is important using a different font color, making sure that they cite their sources.
7. Have a 10 to 20 minute discussion of the information that students find. A suggestion would be for each student to read one section of his/her notes with both the Internet information and his/her evaluation of its importance.

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**Session Three**

1. Have students respond in writing to the following prompt, “Explain whether or not you feel Phillip’s free speech rights were violated.”
2. After allowing students to gather their ideas in writing, ask them to discuss their answers as a class or in small groups. Encourage students to engage specifically in issues that expose different opinions. Ask students to point to evidence from the novel or from their research that supports their beliefs.
3. After students have had time to share their views, introduce position statements, using the [Position Statements](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson394/position-statement.pdf) handout.
4. Answer any questions that students have about how to write position statements. If students need additional examples, work through the process of composing position statements on another topic, such as funding for after-school activities or the use of standardized testing.
5. Once you're satisfied that students understand the task, ask students to create a position statement that related to Phillip’s free speech rights (or another topic) in the novel. Students’ goal during this session is to gather ideas informally. Explain that they will work on creating a more polished statement with support during the next session.
6. As students work in their groups, circulate and monitor student progress, encouraging them to brainstorm reasons for their position. Let them know a few minutes before the work period will conclude so that they have time to wrap up their thoughts.
7. If desired, students can continue their work as homework. By the beginning of the next class session, students should gathered the reasons supporting their position—using their research, passages from the novel, and their personal opinion.

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**Session Four**

1. Introduce the [Persuasion Map Student Interactive](http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/persuasion_map/) to your students, demonstrating how to use the tool. To provide a full example, work through the interactive using one of the example topics from the previous session (e.g., a position on school uniforms).
2. Answer any questions about using the [Persuasion Map](http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/persuasion_map/), then ask students to enter their information in order to construct a position statement and a map of the related support. Ask students to complete their maps as they finish.
3. As students finish and printout their work, arrange them in groups based on their position, placing all the students with the same position together. Ask groups to combine their statements and support to create the strongest argument possible. Groups will refine their statement and support as more students finish and join the group.
4. Once all students have finished with the [Persuasion Map](http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/persuasion_map/) and joined a group, explain that groups will present their position statements and support orally during the next class session.
5. Go over the [Presentation Rubric](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson394/Rubric.pdf), indicating the amount of time each student needs to speak.
6. Allow students the remainder of the class session to work on their presentations.

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**Additional Work Time (optional)**

1. If possible, allow students additional time to work on their group presentations in class. At the beginning of work sessions, remind students of the assignment and the requirements of the [Presentation Rubric](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson394/Rubric.pdf).
2. As students work in their groups, circulate and monitor student progress.
3. If students need additional support for their positions, encourage them to return to the resources used in Session Two.
4. Let them know a few minutes before the work period will conclude so that they have time to wrap up their thoughts.

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**Session Five: Discussing Phillip's Rights**

1. Before the presentations begin, ask students to keep notes on the presentations, consisting of the group’s position, their reasons, and the student’s opinion of the argument. Ask students to use their notes to record any questions they have for the group at then end of the presentation.
2. Rotate through the groups, allowing each group the allotted time to present.
3. When all the groups have presented, ask students to debate whether Phillip’s rights were violated.
4. If possible, arrange the desks in a circle for debate, asking students to sit by people with the same viewpoint.
5. To manage the class discussion, students can pass a sponge ball to someone on the opposite side, with a hand raised, for a response. The responding speaker should acknowledge the main point of the previous speaker, offer an opinion on the point (not the person), and add something original.
6. For homework, ask students to reflect on the entire activity, either in their writer’s notebooks or on paper to be submitted separately. Student reflections can focus on the following questions:
   * Explain what surprised you the most from your research abut students’ rights.
   * Explain how your research affected your opinion of Phillip’s situation.
   * How have you been affected by rights you do or do not have as a student?
   * In what ways are your experiences similar to Philip’s?
   * How has Philip’s situation and your research shaped your view of fighting for your rights?

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**EXTENSIONS**

* Use the students’ printout from the [Persuasion Map](http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/persuasion_map/) as a graphic organizer for a persuasive essay on the novel.
* Tie the rights discussed in this lesson to another novel, such as *Summer of My German Soldier, Farewell to Manzanar, The Witch of Blackbird Pond, Bat 6*, or *Speak*.

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**STUDENT ASSESSMENT/REFLECTIONS**

* As students discuss free speech and the situation in *Nothing But the Truth*, listen for comments that indicate students are identifying specific evidence from the story that connects to the information they have researched. The connections that they make between the details in the novel and the details they choose as their supporting reasons for their position will reveal their understanding and engagement with the novel.
* Monitor student interaction and progress during group work to assess social skills and assist any students having problems with the project.
* Use the [Presentation Rubric](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson394/Rubric.pdf) to assess group presentations.
* Respond to the content and quality of students’ thoughts in their final reflections on the project. Look for indications that the student provides supporting evidence for the reflections, thus applying the lessons learned from the work with the [Persuasion Map](http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/persuasion_map/) and position statements.