

### The First Amendment

An amendment is a section of the nation's constitution. The first ten amendments in the US Constitution are called the Bill of Rights. The Supreme Court makes sure that these laws are upheld not only by the federal government but also by the state and local ones as well.

The First Amendment says: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievance."

- 6 a) Look at the first two pages of this topic again and try to guess which cases might potentially conflict with the First Amendment.
- b) [ ] Discuss your ideas with a partner.



- 7 Read the fact file on "Creationism" first. Then skim through the article in about three minutes and decide whether the author is in favour of creationism being taught at school or not. → S11

### Creationism in science class?

The following article was written by a young student and published on a website that invites young writers to present their work.

I've lived in Madison County all my life. Surrounded by the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains, Madison has more rolling farmland than town. The closest Wal-Mart is half an hour away on the edge of Charlottesville, a liberal oasis best known as the home of the University of Virginia and the Dave Matthews Band. Having Charlottesville so near has always made me feel a little immune to the rural side of my hometown.

It never occurred to me that Madison County would decide to teach creationism in its high-school biology classes. In my mind that only happened in small towns in Tennessee or South Carolina, never Virginia, never so close to places like Charlottesville and Washington, DC. Sadly, this year the school board voted to give creationism and evolution equal time in science classes.

You should know that I am homeschooled. The vote to teach creationism really won't affect me firsthand, so why do I care? Sometimes I don't even know, since my friends who go to the high school don't care half as much as I do. I think it's partially the flawed argument to get creationism into the school that bothers me. Some claim that evolution is only a "theory" and shouldn't be taught as fact. They claim that creationism should also be taught to give students options to choose from, so they can form their own opinions.

#### FACT FILE

Creationism is the belief that God created the world in six days, as reported in the first book of the Old Testament. A more recent term for creationism is "intelligent design" which underlines the claim of conservative Christians that some intelligent being designed our universe. As a scientific explanation, it should be taught along with Darwin's theory of evolution in science classes at public schools.

<sup>3</sup>on the edge just outside  
<sup>13</sup>to affect to have an influence on sb/sth  
<sup>15</sup>flawed having a mistake

At first that logic seems sound: schools should not teach just one idea. But is it fair to say that evolution is only a "theory"? In science, the word theory is used differently than it is in everyday speech. In science, something must be proven before it becomes a theory, and so things we take for granted as fact (the existence of electrons, or the orbit of the earth) are technically still theories.

Evolution is a widely believed theory among scientists; in fact, almost all of its opposition is based on religion. And now we come to creationism. It is impossible to call creationism a scientific theory since it is based on religious beliefs, not science. To believe in creationism, it is essential that you believe in the existence of a higher being. But wait, God in public schools? Doesn't this go against separation of church and state, one of the fundamental concepts of the Constitution?

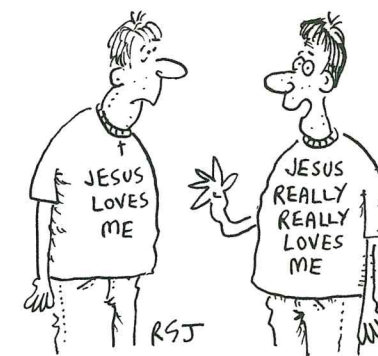
It does. In fact, many communities have been sued for teaching creationism. According to US law, schools can teach different explanations of life on earth, including creationism, but not in science classes. There, only genuinely scientific explanations of life on earth can be taught.

Why does Madison County and increasing numbers of school districts believe they can get away with teaching creationism in science classes? Well, in the end it all comes down to the fact that those who want creationism out of the schools are in the minority. There isn't a large enough, or active enough, group to protest, and no one individual has enough time or money to fight the school board.

Creationism is a very exclusive belief, only fitting in with a certain branch of Christianity. It is not fair to teach a belief unique to one religion in schools as science; it discriminates against anyone who does not believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible. The act of teaching creationism as science goes against the principles upon which our country was founded. The beauty of our Constitution is its protection of people's right to practice any religion they choose. Keeping religion out of public schools is meant to ensure our freedom of religion, and teaching creationism as science is putting this freedom in jeopardy.

Zoe G., Wolfstown, VA

- 8 a) Draw a profile of a typical "creationist" as Zoe presents him or her. What are the arguments in favour of exposing students to this Christian belief?
- b) How does Zoe explain her position?
- c) Would Zoe approve of the cartoon? Explain in detail.
- 9 Find out on the Internet how US courts have recently ruled on this issue and how they have justified their ruling. Be prepared to give a five-minute presentation.
- 10 **Debate:** The following motions deal with the question of the extent to which the state should regulate religious practices and their influence in the public sphere. Decide on one of the following motions and prepare a debate. If applicable find out about how these matters are dealt with in countries such as the US and the UK. → S26
  - This House believes that religious education should be abolished at public schools.
  - This House believes that headscarves for women should be forbidden in public educational institutions.
  - This House believes that a European constitution should have a reference to Christianity.
  - This House would do away with the church tax.



"I'M AN EXTREMIST CHRISTIAN"

Contrast: public/private sch.

brief overview: how does ... function? homeschooling, public, private

<sup>22</sup>to take sth for granted to accept sth without thinking about it  
<sup>31</sup>to sue to take legal action against  
<sup>39</sup>school board Schulbehörde  
<sup>44</sup>literal word for word  
<sup>48</sup>in jeopardy at risk

USE W.R. for your info-sheet...

#### WORD BANK

Arguing for something we propose that • we maintain that • we are of the opinion that • in our view • we argue that • we contend that • we definitely advocate ...

Arguing against something we strongly oppose • we totally object to • this argument doesn't stand/hold because • the argument is on shaky ground because • it's a fallacy to assume that ...