



## The Living News: Classroom Tool Kit

**Author:**  
National Constitution Center  
Education and Theatre Programs Staff

### **About Living News**

*The Living News is a unique live theatrical performance at the National Constitution Center. The production is designed to introduce controversial constitutional issues and encourage students to ask questions about what these issues mean to them. Prior to visiting the Constitution Center, students are asked to examine a news story and connect it directly to the Constitution. During the production, students will be asked to consider their thoughts on a number of issues, ranging from free speech to search and seizure. Back in the classroom, students will reflect on the experience and seek answers as to where they see themselves fitting into our Constitutional system.*



## About this Tool Kit

*Living News* is a play that dramatizes current Constitutional issues, showing students how the Constitution impacts their lives today by focusing on the stories of ordinary people. The play introduces a variety of Constitutional issues and questions, and encourages students to think about where they stand on these issues.

We know it is often challenging for young people to make a personal connection to the Constitution and its relevancy in their lives. That's why we created the play, and that's what we've concentrated on in creating all the activities that surround it – from the post-show discussion, to workshops for teachers, to these pre- and post-performance activities.

Pre-performance activities ask students to think about how topics in the news and their own experiences connect to the Constitution. The performance itself portrays multiple points of view on several issues, and asks students to consider their own positions. Post-performance activities encourage students both to reflect on themes of the play and actively engage in discussions surrounding the differing views on the issues.

The lesson is meant as a menu, from which you can choose any or all of various activities to encourage your students to explore topics relative to their *Living News* experience. The pre- and post-performance activities each begin with a discussion/writing-based exercise. Subsequent exercises use techniques of theater-making, but you don't need experience in drama, and your students don't have to become actors. From classrooms to professional development seminars to community forums, these techniques have proven successful in stimulating creative thinking and learning and inspiring greater civic engagement among participants.

All of the activities contained here are designed to encourage students to think about the personal stories inside the Constitutional issues and, by connecting with them, to come to a greater understanding and mastery of the larger themes and content of the Constitution. In addition, these activities challenge students to consider points of view different from their own by listening hard and even trying on viewpoints with which they might disagree.

By stimulating critical and reflective thinking and dialogue, your students will gain a deeper understanding of how the Constitution works in their lives and what the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are.

In preparing this menu, we have drawn on the resources and experience of a range of artists and civic educators, and want to offer acknowledgement to these sources in particular:

*Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue* by Michael Rohd. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1998).

*Animating Democracy: Arts and Civic Engagement Tool Kit* (Washington, D.C.: Americans for the Arts, 2008).

"Story Circle Process Discussion Paper" by John O'Neal, founder of Junebug Productions, <http://www.racematters.org/storycircleprocess.htm>.

The Theater Programs Department of the NCC and Artistic Staff of *Living News*, especially Nora Berger-Green, Director of Theatre Programs, and David Bradley, *Living News* Artistic Director.



## “New Questions, New Possibilities”: An Introduction to LIVING NEWS

### Grade(s) Level

7-12

### Classroom Time

#### Pre-Visit Activities

Range 15-45 minute class period

#### Living News Production

40 minutes at the National  
Constitution Center

#### Post-Visit Activities

Range 15-45 minute class period

### Handouts

-Finding the Constitution in the  
News

-Where Am I Under the  
Constitution

### Constitution Connections

#### Articles

I-IV

#### Amendments

1-27

### Objectives

Students will:

Examine current issues being  
discussed in American society

Participate in a live theatrical  
production, bringing some of these  
issues to life

Discuss how students' lives are  
connected to the Constitutional  
issues represented

Analyze how current Constitutional  
issues are represented in the media

### The Play

Using three actors, *Living News* dramatizes current Constitutional issues and shows characters grappling with how these issues impact their everyday lives. A debate between two students erupts at the start of a school assembly over whether saying the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance violates First Amendment rights; a teenager and store owner struggle with the rights of citizens to own guns; two students from different family structures offer competing views on the question of same-sex marriage. Incorporating video, contemporary music and current news broadcasts, the fast-paced performance involves the audience throughout and culminates by asking them to share their points of view in a “show of hands” vote on several timely issues.

A post-show discussion follows each performance with the goal of fostering dialogue. In this forum, the actors and museum educators from the NCC ask the audience to discuss the issues, share which characters they agreed or disagreed with, and reflect on how what they heard that might have encouraged them to think differently than they did when they entered the theater.

*Living News* shows the Constitution as a vital guide for the conflicts and dilemmas of today. By watching characters (many of whom are young people) grapple with how to balance their rights as individuals with the government’s need to protect its citizens, students will see how the past informs the present, and how, as the play says, the Constitution is a “gift to the future,” providing an ongoing “method for facing our hardest questions, and resolving them with debate and law.”



<u>The Issues</u>	<u>Examples</u>	<u>Where to Find It</u>
Freedom of Religion	“Under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance	Amendment I
Freedom of Speech	The KKK at Antietam National Park	Amendment I
The Right to Bear Arms	Gun violence	Amendment II  2008 and 2010 Supreme Court Decisions
Same-Sex Marriage	Who can legally marry	Amendment XIV  CA Proposition 8  CT Supreme Ct. Ruling
Capital Punishment	Whether or not to commute a death sentence	Amendment VIII
Search and Seizure	Individual freedom vs. Universal safety	Amendment IV  New Jersey vs. TLO  Post-9/11 policies

### Attending the Performance

*Living News* is fast-paced, up-close and live. The theater only seats 55, so it brings the action right up to the audience. Throughout the play, actors talk directly to the audience and, at times, involve them in the action. This is all intentional—we want an event that encourages the audience to be participants in the story.

It also means that the actors, and other audience members, are aware of everything that happens—from cell phones and text messages (which we know will never be an issue!) to comments. We hope everyone will respect the event and those around them. We want the play to provoke response, and hope audiences will listen, be moved, and even laugh. We’ve planned time afterward to offer everyone a chance to offer their opinions, ask questions and share their thoughts.



## National Standards

### NCSS #4

Individual Development and Identity: Personal identity is shaped by family, peers, culture, and institutional influences. In order to understand individual development and identity, learners should study the influences of various times, cultures, groups, and institutions. The examination of various forms of human behavior in specific cultural contexts enhances the understanding of the relationships between social norms and emerging personal identities, of the social processes that influence identity formation, and of the ethical and other principles underlying individual action.

### NCSS #5

Individuals, Groups, and Institutions: Institutions such as families, and civic, educational, governmental, and religious organizations exert great influence in daily life. Organizations embody the core social values of the individual, and groups who comprise them. It is important that students know how institutions are formed, maintained, and changed, and understand how they influence individuals, groups, and other institutions.

### NCSS #10

Civic Ideals and Practices: An understanding of civic ideals and practices is a fundamental goal of education for citizenship in a democratic society and are developed over centuries. Milestones such as important documents and historical events articulate civic ideals and are the foundations of a democratic republic because they illuminate such as basic freedoms and rights, and the institutions and practices that support shared democratic principles. Learning how to apply civic ideas to inform civic actions is essential to participation in a democracy and support for the common good.

**This lesson was designed according to the following curriculum standards for Social Studies and Civic Education as set forth by the National Council for the Social Studies, the Center for Civic Education and the National Standards for Arts Education.**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

**In addition, the full program allows students to address the following questions:**

What is citizenship?

What are the rights of citizens?

What are the responsibilities of citizens?

How can citizens take part in civic life?



**The program addresses activities that meet the following standards for Theatre Arts Education:**

**Content Standard:** Script writing by the creation of improvisations and scripted scenes based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history

*Achievement Standard:*

- Students individually and in groups, create characters, environments, and actions that create tension and suspense
- Students refine and record dialogue and action

**Content Standard:** Researching by using cultural and historical information to support improvised and scripted scenes

*Achievement Standard:*

- Students apply research from print and nonprint sources to script writing, acting, design, and directing choices

**Content Standard:** Researching by evaluating and synthesizing cultural and historical information to support artistic choices

*Achievement Standard, Proficient:*

- Students identify and research cultural, historical, and symbolic clues in dramatic texts, and evaluate the validity and practicality of the information to assist in making artistic choices for informal and formal productions

*Achievement Standard, Advanced:*

- Students research and describe appropriate historical production designs, techniques, and performances from various cultures to assist in making artistic choices for informal and formal theatre, film, television, or electronic media productions



## Activities

### Pre-Visit Activities

#### **“Real people challenging laws to change things”: Understanding the Constitution in our Everyday Life (Full class period)**

1. On a sheet of paper ask students to create a list of current Constitutional issues being discussed in the United States.
2. Have students share their responses and note the responses in the front of the classroom for all the students to see.

##### **Insider’s Tip**

During class, set-up a workstation with an internet connection. The National Constitution Center’s website features a dynamic interactive Constitution at: <http://www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution>. Use the search function to locate how keywords connect to the Constitution. This can provide an easy “answer key” to students connections of current issues to the Constitution.

3. Discuss the following with the class:
  - In preparation for their visit to the National Constitution Center, they will be examining the Constitutional connection to current events
  - During their visit at the Constitution Center, they will participate in a live theatrical production that examines current Constitutional issues.
  - The production will use current events to tell the stories of Constitutional controversies.
4. Distribute copies of the United States Constitution (printable copies available at: <http://www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution/constitution.pdf>). Ask students to examine the Constitution and identify which Articles and Amendments are addressed in the list of current issues the class put together.
5. Visit the National Constitution Center’s website and blog, and print out and distribute one of the “What We’re Reading” news stories from *Constitution Daily* site: [blog.constitutioncenter.org](http://blog.constitutioncenter.org)  
*(if you classroom is equipped with a digital projector you can share the site with the students and ask them to choose the article the class as a whole will examine.)*
6. Distribute the article to all students, and ask the class to read the article. As a class, ask students to summarize the article and, using the already distributed Constitutions, ask students to identify which sections or amendments of the Constitution are addressed in the article.
7. When the activity is completed, ask the students to consider the following questions as they watch the performance:
  - What Constitutional issues are portrayed?
  - Have you seen these issues in the news? Was the reporting of the issue balanced?
  - How does this issue affect you? Your friends? Your family?

#### **Extension**

- Ask students to find a news story on their own from a newspaper or news website and complete the “Finding the Constitution in the News” handout, which is attached.



## “Of Course It Matters What We Think”: Expressing Personal Points of View

### **Brown Paper (or Blackboard) Town Hall (15 minutes)**

This activity offers a way to jump-start your exploration of Constitutional issues (perhaps in the class prior to seeing *Living News*) or a great follow up for the first class after seeing the play.

- When students enter the classroom, they encounter brown paper with prompts on tables and/or walls, or prompts written on sections of blackboard.
- Invite the students to write brief personal responses to these prompts:
  - “Freedom of speech” in my life means...
  - When I think of freedom of religion, I think of...
  - Something I’d like to change about our laws or Constitution is...
  - The first time the Constitution had a direct impact on me, I was...
- Encourage students to write answers to all of the prompts—short phrases are fine.
- When they are finished, ask them to raise their hands and read a response written by someone else which they found interesting.
- You can then invite the student who wrote it to share more about that response.

### **Agree/Disagree/Unsure (15-20 minutes)**

This activity can be very useful in encouraging a safe environment for students to express their views. It is important that students participate silently until asked to speak.

- Have the class stand in the center of the room. At three different places in the room (preferably on either end and in the middle) post three signs: AGREE; DISAGREE; UNSURE.
- Read one of the statements below (or come up with your own list). Ask students to move to the sign that best expresses their position on the statement you’ve read. They can’t stand in between—they must choose one of the three.
- After the groups have gathered, ask the group with the fewest number if anyone (or just one person) wants to say why they’ve chosen to stand there. Then ask the next smallest group and finally the largest (this makes it easier for those in the smallest group to speak up—they don’t have to follow the majority). It’s important that no one responds to students who speak. This is not about debate or dialogue, but about expressing views in a safe environment.
- Once one or a few from each group have spoken, ask if any students want to change where they are standing.
- Then, ask students to return silently to the center, read the next statement, and repeat the process.
- Sample statements related to *Living News* and Constitutional issues could include:
  - *I think burning the flag should be illegal.*
  - *The government has the right to regulate the use and ownership of gun control.*
  - *The government has the right to define marriage.*
  - *It is never alright to enter the United States illegally.*
  - *Schools have the right to monitor student internet usage.*
  - *I would support the right of a racist group to speak in a public place.*



- *I would give up individual freedom for the security of all.*
- *I think the voting age should be lowered to 16.*
- *I think the government has the right to restrict content on the internet.*
- *I think if you commit murder, you should be put to death.*
- After the performance, you could return to these statements and see if any students have a different perspective.

### **Story Circle (Full class period)**

The Story Circle is an excellent opportunity for students to share their personal experiences and thoughts on a topic and, perhaps more importantly, to listen to each other in a process that's fair, democratic and open. This could be used before seeing the show, or after.

- Create a circle in your classroom where everyone can see each other. If you have a large class or even a smaller class that works well together, you can create two or three smaller circles, and you can float between.
- Everyone is invited to respond to this prompt: ***“Tell a short story about a time you stood up for something you believed in.”*** Stories should only be 2-3 minutes long.
- After giving everyone a moment to think, you can start, or appoint someone, and then go clockwise. Encourage students ahead of time to listen to the stories of others, and not to be thinking about what they will say. If someone doesn't have anything to tell, or doesn't wish to speak, they can pass. This is important—it's not mandatory that everyone speaks.
- After all who wish to have spoken, invite those who passed to speak. You can then do a second round in which people reflect on what they heard or offer common threads/themes that they noticed.



## Post-Visit Activities

### **“Where Am I Under the Constitution?” Continuing the Conversation (45 Minutes)**

1. Display the last line of the Living News production in the front of the class for all students to see: ***Where am I under the Constitution?***
2. Ask students to discuss the question and their reactions to the *Living News* production.
3. Divide the class into groups of 3-4. Distribute copies of **Where Am I Under the Constitution** **handout**. Ask students in their groups to complete the first column: “The Conflict”, by summarizing what the main conflict in each of the scenes of *Living News*. Have the groups present their summaries.
4. For the next two columns, ask students to work independently. For each scene, ask them to choose a character from that scene, and write that person in the “Who Am I” column. Then ask them to complete the “Where Am I” column by considering how this character is affected by the issue and where they could be affected by the issue being discussed. Provide them with the following example:
  - **Pledge of Allegiance:** I am a classroom teacher and one day I may have a student who chooses to sit during the pledge of allegiance. I then have to decide how I address this issue with the student, or if I do anything at all.
5. Ask for student volunteers to share their statements for each topic. Encourage discussion with the class as a whole, to assist their peers with fine tuning their connections.

#### **Extension**

- Ask students to examine news stories on the “What We’re Reading” section of the National Constitution Center’s blog: [blog.constitutioncenter.org](http://blog.constitutioncenter.org) and look for stories that address the same issues represented in the Living New performance. You may then use these stories as examples for use in the activity above.



## “To the Editor” Exploring Multiple Points of View

The following exercises are designed to help students experience different points of view on a single issue. They make use of writing, storytelling, improvisation and collaboration.

As students begin to explore issues imaginatively, inventing stories and taking on points of view other than their own, a few simple guidelines (courtesy of theatre/civic dialogue expert Michael Rohd) can encourage work that is creative yet focused:

- **Stay in it:** Try your best to keep your story or idea going, without “breaking,” laughing or commenting on what you’re doing.
- **Make it important:** The topics certainly are serious, and students should strive to create stories that matter (as opposed to spoofing or commenting).
- **Build a story:** How can one idea build on the one before, so that students are creating a story, whether they are working individually or together?

You can have the entire class work on each exercise below, or divide the group up to work on different exercises simultaneously, then come together at the end of one period (or a second period if you want more time) to share. Whether you do all three of these exercises, or some combination of them, it can be useful to save or record the stories or ideas, because they provide useful material to build upon for additional work.

Whatever you choose, begin with the whole class doing the brainstorming part of the “Creating a Character Story.” This will create a shared pool of ideas from which to work.

(We’ll use the issue of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment as a model, but you can adapt this to any of a variety of issues.)

### **Creating a Character Story (20 minutes or more, depending on number of student participants)**

- Write this question on the board **“Why should individuals have the right to own guns, or not?”** Make two columns underneath: one that says “Yes” and one that says “No.”
- As a class, brainstorm as many reasons as you can why individuals should or shouldn’t be able to own guns. Encourage students to offer ideas under both columns. Encourage them to see the question from a point of view different from the one they might hold.
- Then, have students volunteer to take one of the reasons offered and build a character’s story around it. For instance, under “Yes” someone might have offered the reason “Individuals have the right to protect themselves.” Someone could then create a story about a person who lives alone in a neighborhood that has become dangerous. She knows of neighbors who’ve been mugged or even shot. After years of refusing to go near guns, she’s decided to buy one for protection.
- Students develop these stories individually, working silently. It can be helpful to let them walk around the room to get a sense of the person in their body. They shouldn’t write the story down—the idea is to tell it simply, as the person they’ve imagined. It’s not acting—it’s just telling a first person story. There’s no need to change their voice or “act” older or younger.
- After a person tells a story, the class asks him or her questions, with the storyteller staying in the role of the character. Encourage questions that are non-judgmental. The questions are an opportunity to discover more about the story and how the character feels about the subject.



### **Letters to the Editor (15-20 minutes)**

- Ask students to choose a reason from the board that represents a point of view different from their own.
- Then, have each write a letter to the editor of a newspaper or website that expresses that point of view. (Remind them of the form such a letter takes, an example of which they saw in the play, during the scene about the KKK). Encourage them not only to give reasons for their position but to include the personal experience of the writer.
- Share these letters out loud. It can work well to alternate points of view as you share them.

### **Blog Posts (15 minutes)**

- This activity allows students to work in groups of 3-5.
- You can give each group a large piece of paper, or ask them to have a few regular size sheets ready. Ask the groups to imagine they are in a “live conversation” on a blog, posting responses one after the other.
- One person begins with a short post (again, challenge students to think from a different point than their own). The post need not be more than a few sentences.
- Then, the next person writes, in response to and with a different point of view than the one before. It continues this way, until each person has written 2-3 posts.
- When the groups are done, have them share the posts aloud.

This exercise builds skills in flexible thinking, because students must take on a point of view that is different than the one that has come before.

The form of the exercise encourages a kind of playfulness, which is great, but remind students of the three guidelines above (*Stay in It; Make It Important; Build a Story*) to help them stay focused.

### ***“Those Are Some Pretty Strong Words”* Interpreting the Amendments (15-20 minutes)**

This exercise encourages collaboration, kinesthetic learning and builds skills in interpreting meaning through a variety of forms.

- Divide the class into groups of 3-5.
- Give each group an Amendment to the Constitution. (The First, Second, Ninth and the first half of the Fourth can work well).
- Ask each group to create a tableau, or frozen picture, which expresses that Amendment. They can also think of it as a sculpture of the Amendment. They can think literally, or metaphorically, or in terms of story—however it hits them.
- It’s helpful for students not to plan too much—someone can stand up and strike a first pose, and then they can build on that.



- Give each group up to 10 minutes to create. Then, one by one, have each group share their creation. Ask the group to hold their pose, and then you can facilitate interpretation with the rest of the class.
- Possible questions can include:
  - What would the title of this picture be?
  - What happened just before? What will happen next?
  - (*Pick a particular person inside the picture*) What is this person saying or thinking?
- It can be worth writing down responses, because these can be useful starting points for subsequent exercises.

## **“You Have to Hear People Out” Improvising on the Issues**

### **(10-15 minutes per question)**

This exercise encourages students both to express a point of view and to listen to an opposing point of view and respond to it. Improvising encourages students to be masters of material by having them synthesize facts and information and use them to support the personal convictions of a character.

It’s worth reviewing, or introducing, these guidelines—it will help students build successful conversations:

- **Stay in it:** Try your best to keep your story or idea going, without “breaking,” laughing or commenting on what you’re doing.
- **Make it important:** The topics certainly are serious, and students should strive to create stories that matter (as opposed to spoofing or commenting).
- **Build a story:** How can one idea build on the one before, so that students are creating a story, whether they are working individually or together.
- **Avoid saying “No”:** This stops the conversation.

### **Conversation 1: Same-Sex Marriage**

- Have the class form two lines, facing each other.
- To begin, those in Line A will step forward to begin a conversation with their partner in Line B. A wants to convince B of his/her point of view, and will use information, facts and personal story to support the argument and build a story. Person B wants to do the same.
- Person A approaches Person B and says **“You can’t deny us our basic rights.”** They build a conversation from there, inventing who they are, what their situation is, etc.
- After all pairs have worked simultaneously, ask them to pause. Then spotlight individual pairs, asking them to start their conversation from the beginning.
- After a pair has reached a good place to stop (often a high point, or a place they cannot move past), ask each person to state what was important to the *other* person in the scene.
- Then ask the rest of the students to share what strong ideas they heard, or if anything in the conversation got them to think in a new way.
- You can also ask them if there’s something they thought one person could have said to advance the conversation (this can be a useful tool to use in the midst of a scene if a pair is stuck. Pause the scene, ask for suggestions, then ask the pair to resume, using one a suggestion from the group to advance the conversation).



## **“The Marketplace of Ideas” Questions for the Characters in *LIVING NEWS* (15 minutes)**

This exercise directly relates to the *Living News* performance. It provides both an opportunity to assess something the students took away from the play, and a way to encourage reflective, analytical and critical thinking.

- Ask students to choose a character from one of the scenes and pose a question in writing to that character that challenges a stand the character took during the play or a particular point of view the character expressed.
- Then, you can have the student who posed the question answer it as that character, or have students answer each other’s questions in writing.
- Students can share these questions and answers aloud.

## **“Ok, What Do You Think?” Your *LIVING NEWS***

This activity offers students an opportunity to work together to synthesize information, interpret current issues and present their ideas in a creative format. Students can think of it as their own *Living News* presentation.

**TIME:** This activity works best as a culmination of exploring these issues in a variety of ways. It’s useful to provide groups with a good amount of time to work together. It could be a project they return to from time to time for parts of class periods, with a final class to “rehearse” and then a class to share. Or, you could assign the project in the final 10 minutes of a class, give groups one whole class to create, and then share the pieces in the next class.

- Divide the class into groups of 5.
- Give each group a controversial Constitutional issue, together with a particular news story that puts the issue in the context of a story (see the Extension in Section I for examples, though finding a story that is as current as possible is best).
- The groups will use the story and what they’ve learned about the issue (and any other research they want to bring to the process), along with the techniques in the exercises above to create a short “collage” of tableaux, writing and improvisations that they present to the class.
- Things for the group to think about:
  - What are the key questions they hope to explore or dialogue they hope to provoke?
  - What are the stories inside the issue?
  - How do they want to personalize the issue?
  - How will they express multiple points of view?
- Techniques the groups can use (all of which are explored in previous activities):
  - Characters telling individual stories
  - Letters to the editor
  - Sculpture/Tableaux(complete with “thought bubbles”)
  - Two person scenes
  - Interviews (like the questions that followed the storytelling exercise)
  - Blog posts



## Finding the Constitution in the News

Student Directions:

*Living News*, which you'll see at the National Constitution Center, draws its inspiration from current events and news that has Constitutional connections. Using this worksheet, take a current news story and break it down according to the categories below.

<b>TITLE</b>	
<b>WHO</b> Are the main characters in the story?	
<b>WHAT</b> Is the main event?	
<b>CONFLICT</b> What is the main conflict or issue?	
<b>CONSTITUTIONAL CONNECTION</b> How does the conflict connect to the Constitution?	



## Where Am I under the Constitution

### Student Directions

In the column marked *The Conflict*, work in groups to summarize the main conflict or issue in each scene you saw in *Living News*. In the *Where am I* column, write down a connection between yourself and the Constitutional issue being discussed.

<u>Scene</u>	<u>The Conflict (What was the main issue in the scene?)</u>	<u>Where am I</u>
Pledge of Allegiance		
The KKK at Antietam		
The Right to Bear Arms		
Same-Sex Marriage		
Immigration		
Search and Seizure		