

## Unit 6 Web Activity That Old Time Religion

### Introduction

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. . . .

—Amendment I to the U.S.  
Constitution

I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.

—Thomas Jefferson’s letter to the Danbury Baptists, January 1, 1802

Thomas Jefferson said that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution built a "wall of separation" between this country's religious institutions and its government. How high do you think that wall should be?

This lesson will help you to investigate the Supreme Court rulings regarding religion in the public schools. If you do not already have an opinion on this controversial topic, you will be able to formulate one after this lesson.

### Directions

The lesson has four steps. First, you will read a statement about the state of religion in public schools today. Second, link to various Web sites to research how different religious groups view the issue of religion in the public schools. Third, you will read summaries of several Supreme Court decisions regarding this controversial issue. Finally, you will clarify your own opinion.

### Step 1:

Read [Religion In The Public Schools: A Joint Statement Of Current Law](#). This is a statement created by 38 religious organizations, all of whom agree that this was an accurate summary of law in 1995 (although they do not all agree that this is the way the law SHOULD be). Keep in mind that this document, written in 1995, is slightly out of date. Some issues that are described as undecided have since been clarified by the Supreme Court. You will identify some of these issues later in this lesson.

Write down three policies in the Joint Statement with which you either agree or disagree.

**Step 2:**

Below are links to several religious and political groups that have dedicated sections of their Web sites to the topic of religion in public schools. Click on groups that represent a variety of viewpoints and discover how they think the issue of religion in public schools should be handled.

\*\*\* Please note: The absence of a particular religious group only indicates that the Web sites representing that group did not have a specific section dedicated to religion in public schools. Keep in mind that for some religious and political groups, this issue is more in the forefront than for others. This lesson does not intend to show favoritism to specific groups.

<a href="#">American Civil Liberties Union</a>	<a href="#">Baptist Joint Committee</a>	<a href="#">The Freedom Forum</a>	<a href="#">People for the American Way</a>
<a href="#">American Jewish Committee</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Commencement</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Religious Diversity in Schools</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Teaching about Religion Vouchers</a></li> </ul>	<a href="#">Interfaith Alliance</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Vouchers</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">School Prayer</a></li> </ul>	<a href="#">The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life</a>
<a href="#">American Jewish Congress</a>	<a href="#">Christian Legal Society</a>	<a href="#">National Council of Churches</a>	<a href="#">United Church of Christ</a>
<a href="#">Americans for Religious Liberty</a>	<a href="#">Evangelical Lutheran Church in America</a>	<a href="#">National Council of Jewish Women</a>	
<a href="#">Americans United for Separation of Church and State</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Vouchers</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Educational Choice</a></li> </ul>	<a href="#">National Sikh Center</a>	

**Step 3:**

There have been several landmark Supreme Court cases that have defined how religion may enter the realm of the public schools. Read the summaries below and click on the links of the ones that interest you. Your teacher will tell you how many cases to read. As you read each decision, summarize it in your own words and then explain whether you agree or disagree with the Court.

[\*Good News Club v. Milford Central School \(2001\)\*](#)

Milford Central School excluded the Good News Club (a private Christian club for children) from meeting after hours at the school because it was concerned that permitting the Club's activities would violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Was this prohibition a violation of the free exercise clause?

[\*Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe \(2000\)\*](#)

Does the Santa Fe Independent School District's policy permitting student-led, student-initiated prayer at football games violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment?

[\*Rosenberger v. University of Virginia \(1995\)\*](#)

Did the University of Virginia violate the First Amendment rights of its Christian magazine staff by denying them the same funding resources that it made available to secular student-run magazines?

[\*Board of Education Kiryas Joel Village School v. Grumet \(1994\)\*](#)

In 1989, the New York legislature passed a law to redraw the boundaries for school districts in the state. In doing so, it intentionally drew its boundaries to keep together the Village of Kiryas Joel, a religious enclave of Satmar Hasidim who practice a strict form of Judaism. Did the 1989 statute violate the First Amendment's Establishment Clause?

[\*Lamb's Chapel v. Center Moriches School District \(1993\)\*](#)

Did the District violate the First Amendment's freedom of speech when it denied Lamb's Chapel the use of school premises to show religious-oriented films?

[\*Lee v. Weisman \(1992\)\*](#)

Does the inclusion of clergy who offer prayers at official public school ceremonies violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment?

[\*Edwards v. Aguillard \(1987\)\*](#)

Did a Louisiana law, which mandated the teaching of "creation science" along with the theory of evolution, violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment as applied to the states through the Fourteenth Amendment?

[\*Wallace v. Jaffree \(1985\)\*](#)

Did an Alabama law authorizing teachers to conduct regular religious prayer services and activities in school classrooms during the school day violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment?

[\*Stone v. Graham \(1980\)\*](#)

Did the Kentucky state law that required the posting of a copy of the Ten Commandments in each public school classroom violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment?

[\*Abington Township v. Schempp \(1963\)\*](#)

Did the Pennsylvania law and Abington's policy, requiring public school students to participate in classroom religious exercises, violate the religious freedom of students as protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments?

[\*Engel v. Vitale \(1962\)\*](#)

Does the reading of a nondenominational prayer at the state of the school day violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment?

**Step 4:**

Now it is time for you to decide what you think about one of the issues regarding religion in public schools. Choose one of the Supreme Court cases you summarized and expressed your opinion about in Step 3. Write an editorial for the newspaper as if the decision had just been handed down the previous day. Briefly explain the facts of the case, the decision, and why you agree or disagree with the decision. Regardless of the position you take, you must support your opinion in your editorial. Hand in your editorial to your teacher.