



Grade 5 Lesson Plan #3: When Governments Ignore Unalienable Rights

Teacher Notes

This lesson mirrors Lesson 2 structure and pacing. It helps students analyze what happens when governments fail to protect unalienable rights using close reading, vocabulary, coding, graphic organizers, and discussion.

Materials:

Text: Handout 1: The Sedition Act of 1798

Handouts:

- Handout 2: Shaping Your Written Response
- Handout 3: Directed Note-Taking Graphic Organizer
- Handout 4: Video Thinking Prompts & Debate Organizer
- Handout 5: Then & Now Comparison Chart

Preparation:

Number paragraphs of the Lesson 3 text.

Prepare vocabulary cards.

Review the selected video segment.

Provide highlighters or pencils for in text coding.

Standards Alignment:

Florida Grade 5 Civics Literacy Standard—**SS.5.CG.1.1**: Recognize that the Declaration of Independence affirms that every U.S. citizen has certain unalienable rights. *Clarification 3*: Students will discuss the consequences of governments not recognizing that citizens have certain unalienable rights.

Reading/Writing: Students will read a historical explanation text about the Sedition Act of 1798 and analyze how government actions affected citizens' unalienable rights and the principle of consent of the governed. Through reading, text coding, discussion, and written response, students will:

- Identify unalienable rights and civic principles ignored by the national government.
- Cite evidence using paragraph numbers from the text.
- Explain the consequences of government actions that restricted rights.
- Describe how constitutional principles and elections addressed these problems.

- Produce a final written paragraph that connects historical events to civic principles that still matter today.

Essential Question

What happens when governments ignore unalienable rights?

Opening (15 minutes, Handout #2)

Review and Hook (5 minutes)

- **Recall:** Review the essential question from Lesson 2: “How did the King’s denial of the colonists’ rights lead to the establishment of ‘**Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness**’ as the foundation of the new American government?” Briefly revisit how students identified **unalienable rights** and why people form governments to protect them.
- **Connect:** Pose the bridging question: “If governments exist to protect people’s unalienable rights... what happens when a government **ignores** those rights?” Explain that today’s lesson explores what happened **after independence**, when the **United States government itself** passed a law that limited citizens’ rights—and why **consent of the governed** still mattered even under a new Constitution.

Vocabulary Instruction (10 minutes)

Direct Instruction: Introduce key terms using context, word parts, and student-friendly definitions connected to the Lesson 3 text (*The Sedition Act of 1798*), focusing on how government actions affected unalienable rights and consent of the governed.

- **Oppression:** When people in power use their authority in unfair or harsh ways that limit people’s freedom or rights.
- **Sedition:** Actions or speech that encourages people to resist or revolt against the government or other lawful authorities.
- **Consent of the Governed:** The idea that a government gets its power from the people and must keep that permission by protecting their rights.
- **Liberty:** The freedom to think, speak, and act without unfair government control.

Paragraph	Word	How it Will be Taught	Student-Friendly Definition
2	Oppression	Word parts: <i>op-</i> (against) + <i>press</i> (to push down) Context: Unfair treatment by people in power that limits freedom.	Unfair treatment by people in power that limits freedom.
2	Consent of the Governed	Word parts: consent (permission) + govern (rule)	The idea that people give the government permission to rule.

		Context: Government power depends on the people’s approval.	
3	Sedition	Word origin: <i>sedition</i> (to stir up) Context: Laws punishing people for criticizing the government.	Resisting or revolting against the government.
4	Liberty	Context: Free speech and press protected in the Bill of Rights.	The freedom to share ideas and make choices without unfair control.

Word Sort Activity

Word Sort Activity: Have students sort the word list below into two categories: **PROTECTED SPEECH and GOVERNMENT PUNISHMENTS.**

Students sort and place key vocabulary and concepts under the correct column. The terms in the two columns do not need to be connected.

Terms that are PROTECTED SPEECH

Terms that are GOVERNMENT PUNISHMENTS

Which of these terms are ways people express ideas, and which show actions that governments have taken to punish citizens?

Terms to include:

- Opinion
- Criticism
- Protest
- Arrest
- Jail
- Fine

Notice that some of these describe things people do (like speech or action such as criticism or protest), and some are things the governments have done, sometimes fairly and sometimes unjustly, to punish citizens.

Example Teacher Prompts

- “Which of these describes something people should be allowed to do freely?”
- “Which ones show actions that governments have taken to punish citizens?”

Reading and Text Coding (30 minutes)

Reading #1: Categorizing and Connecting (15 minutes)

Text Coding: Students read the text “*The Sedition Act of 1798*” and use four codes to mark sections:

- **R:** A right that is being ignored or violated
- **C:** Evidence related to consent of the governed (how the government uses power with or without the people’s permission)
- **E:** Effects or consequences for the government for government actions that restricted rights
- **G:** General information or background details

Teacher Modeling: Model coding for paragraphs 1–3, specifically:

- marking **R** (Rights Ignored) where the text shows limits placed on freedom of speech or expression (liberty, free speech and press),
- marking **C** (Consent) where the text describes the government using power without clear permission from the people (silencing voice, fear limiting participation),
- marking **E** (Effect) where the text shows consequences the government faced for restricting rights (loss of trust, protests, election loss, law expiring),
- and marking **G** (General Information) where the text is not aligned with the codes, R, C, or E.

Independent Practice: Students continue coding paragraphs 4-7.

Reading #2: Directed Note-Taking (15 minutes, Handout #3)

Guiding Question: What unalienable rights were ignored, and what evidence shows how the government’s actions affected people’s ability to speak freely?

Handout 3 Graphic Organizer: Students complete a chart showing how the government ignored key unalienable rights during the enforcement of the Sedition Act.

Unalienable Right/Principle	Student-Friendly Definition	Evidence from Text Showing Government Action (include paragraph numbers)	Why This Matters Today
Life	Life in this text aligns with the concept that safety, survival, and security are at risk under government power.		
Liberty	Liberty in this text includes freedom of speech and press.		

Pursuit of Happiness	Pursuit of happiness in this text aligns with the concept that people are free to work, participate, and live without fear.		
Consent of the Governed	Consent of the governed in this text aligns with the ability to criticize leaders, agree to the rules, and hold government accountable.		

Teacher note: *Not every unalienable right is affected in the same way. Some rights are limited directly, while others are affected indirectly when people are punished for expressing ideas or criticism. Students may find some rights easier to identify than others; the goal is to support their reasoning with evidence, not to find a single correct answer.*

Extended Text Discussion (25 minutes, Handout #4)

Video Clip (5 minutes, Handout #4)

Show the selected segment from **National Constitution Center's "The Consent of the Governed"** (<https://constitutioncenter.org/essays/the-consent-of-the-governed>) and focus on how liberty connects to consent of the governed. Because this video uses sophisticated language and moves quickly, consider pausing at natural points to check for understanding. Note this concept to the students: "As you watch, think about how consent of the governed connects to people's ability to express ideas and criticize the government." The following spots work well:

1. 0:45 — Pause when the narrator explains that "consent of the governed" was tied to representation and that nearly every major debate of the revolutionary era centered on this idea.
 - a. Ask: "How did the colonists connect consent to representation?" and "Why was the idea of having a voice so important?"
 - b. Clarify: Representation meant people must have some say in government decisions.
2. 1:40 — Pause after the narrator reviews the Stamp Act and describes the belief that property cannot be taken without consent.
 - a. Ask: "How did taxes connect to consent?" and "Why did colonists think these taxes violated their rights?"
 - b. Clarify: Tie back to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—colonists believed losing property without consent threatened basic freedoms.
3. 2:00 — Pause after the narrator contrasts Parliament's idea of virtual representation with colonists' belief in actual representation.
 - a. Ask: "What's the difference between virtual and actual representation?"

- b. Clarify: Colonists believed consent = voting for their own representatives.
4. 3:02 — Pause when the narrator connects colonial ideas to the structure of new state constitutions (governor, senate, house).
 - a. Ask: “How did new state governments try to solve the representation problem?”
 - b. Clarify: Connect to popular sovereignty — power comes from the people.
 5. 4:05 — Pause when the narrator explains how some state governments began abusing power, leading to worries about “excesses of democracy” and motivating the Constitutional Convention of 1787.
 - a. Ask: “Why were some leaders worried about too much power in state legislatures?”
 - b. Clarify: This shows why many leaders wanted clearer rules about how power should be shared and limited.
 6. 5:10 — Pause when Federalists discuss locating sovereignty in the people and redefining representation so that all federal officers (including judges) are agents of the people.
 - a. Ask: “How did Federalists argue that the Constitution still protected consent of the governed?”
 - b. Clarify: This establishes the Constitution as grounded in consent, even with a stronger government.

Viewing Guide (Handout #4, Part 1)

Students jot notes while watching:

- “How does the video explain ‘consent of the governed’?”
- “What examples of representation or voting are mentioned?”
- “What problems showed consent was being ignored?”
- “How did early Americans try to address these problems?”

Partner Share and Preparation (5 minutes)

- *Question:* “Which unalienable right or principle — Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness, or Consent of the Governed — was most threatened by the Sedition Act, and why?”
- *Task (Handout #4, Part 2):* Partners select one principle and identify **two pieces of evidence** from the text showing how the government’s actions threatened that principle during the enforcement of the Sedition Act.

Whole Class Discussion: The Foundation (15 minutes)

- *Focus:* Debate which principle was the most essential for maintaining a fair government in the years after the Revolution.
- *Teacher Facilitation:*
 - *Presentations:* Have groups argue for their chosen principle, citing evidence (e.g., “Consent of the governed was most essential because the text shows people were punished for criticizing the government, meaning they could not freely give or withdraw consent.”)

- *Challenge:* “If people are punished for criticizing the government, can they truly give consent to be governed? Doesn’t the right to Life — being safe and able to survive — have to come first?”
 - *Synthesize:* Guide students to see that all four ideas — **Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness, and Consent of the Governed** — work together. When people lose the ability to speak freely or give consent, trust breaks down and governments risk becoming unfair or abusive.
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Final Written Response and Closure (15 minutes)

Handout #2: Final Written Response (12 minutes)

Writing Prompt: How did the actions of the federal government during the enforcement of the Sedition Act show that leaders were ignoring unalienable rights and the consent of the governed?

Instructions:

Write a well-developed paragraph that:

- **States a claim** connecting a specific government action (such as limiting speech or punishing criticism) to a violated principle (Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness, or Consent of the Governed).
- **Explains** how that action denied or threatened the selected right or principle.
- **Includes at least TWO pieces of textual evidence** from The Sedition Act of 1798 text, with paragraph numbers.
- **Students should focus on government actions and their effect on rights**, not on whether they agree with the ideas being expressed.

Closure (3 minutes)

Connection to Today — Turn-and-Talk:

““The Constitution was created to protect people’s rights and ensure government power comes from the people. What evidence from the video or text suggests this is still something our country must work to protect today?”

Handout #5 – Then/Now Reflection:

Then: An example from the Sedition Act showing how speech or consent of the governed was limited.

Now: An example of how rights or consent of the governed are protected today.

Exit Ticket:

“Write one example of how a U.S. citizen uses **consent of the governed** today.”

Handout #1

The Sedition Act of 1798

The Declaration of Independence claimed that all people have **unalienable rights**—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are rights that are yours the moment you are born; no government gives them to you. The Declaration also explains that the purpose of government is to protect those rights. But what happens when the government fails to protect them—or even violates them? The **Sedition Act of 1798** shows us the consequences: anger, arrests for speaking out, political division, and a major change in leadership. As we explore this story, we'll learn new words like oppression, sedition, and sovereignty to understand why protecting our rights matters.

The Declaration says “that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the **consent of the governed**.” That means the people agree to the rules. This idea is called **popular sovereignty**, which means the power to rule comes from us, the citizens. To truly give consent, citizens must be able to voice their concerns and to speak their minds freely. We call this free speech. If a government ignores this, it can lead to **oppression**, when leaders unfairly control or hurt people, making them feel trapped or unable to express their views.

The Sedition Act of 1798

The founders were very concerned about protecting rights like free speech. After all, that was one of the reasons for the Revolutionary War and the Declaration in the first place. In fact, when the U.S. Constitution was adopted, the right to free speech was one of the fundamental rights explicitly listed in the **Bill of Rights**. Those were the first ten amendments to the Constitution that protected rights like speech and freedom of the press. Then, in 1798, about 20 years after the Declaration and less than ten years after the Constitution was adopted, Congress passed the Sedition Act.

The young country was worried about a possible war with France. President John Adams and his Federalist Party passed the Sedition Act to “protect” the nation. This law made it illegal to write, print, or say anything “false, scandalous, and malicious” against the government, Congress, or the president. People could be heavily fined or sent to jail for up to two years—just for criticizing leaders!

Many Americans, including future presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, saw this as oppression. It threatened the unalienable right to liberty—especially free speech and press,

which let people share ideas and hold leaders accountable. Newspaper editors were arrested for printing stories against the president. One famous case was Congressman Matthew Lyon. He called President Adams power-hungry, and for that, he was thrown in jail. (People even re-elected him while he was locked up.) This violated the very rights citizens had fought for in the Revolution and went against popular sovereignty, because people couldn't freely speak out without fear.

The Consequences

The consequences of the Sedition Act were serious. First, many people lost trust in their leaders, feeling oppressed instead of protected. This led to protests and heated arguments across the country. Second, it caused deep division between political parties. Third, the law backfired—the anger helped Thomas Jefferson win the presidency in 1800. This had a big impact. Jefferson called his election a “revolution” won with votes, not guns. As soon as he became president in 1801, he pardoned everyone jailed under the Sedition Act and let the law expire. This helped remind everyone that free speech is key to keeping government fair.

What the Sedition Act Teaches Fifth Graders Like You

The Sedition Act teaches us why unalienable rights matter. When a government ignores them—like punishing people for their words—it risks oppression, losing people's trust, and big changes. Today, you use your rights when you feel safe at school (life), share your ideas in class (liberty), or work toward goals like joining a sports team (pursuit of happiness). As citizens, you're part of America's team, and your voice helps shape a fair government. How will you use your voice to stand up for fairness?

Handout #2

Shaping Your Written Response

PREDICT—

In Lesson 2, we learned that the Declaration of Independence said governments must protect unalienable rights — Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness — and that government power comes from the consent of the governed. In today’s text about the Sedition Act of 1798, the federal government limited speech, punished criticism of leaders, and arrested or jailed people for expressing ideas.

Before reading further, predict:

If people are punished for criticizing the government and cannot freely express their ideas, what rights or principles do you think they would want to protect MOST strongly — and why?

List at least **THREE rights or principles** you predict citizens would want protected and explain **WHY** each one matters based on the problems described.

Example to guide thinking: “If people are punished for criticizing the government, they might want to protect the right to _____ because...”

FINAL WRITTEN RESPONSE —

Writing Prompt:

How did the actions of the federal government during the enforcement of the Sedition Act show that leaders were ignoring unalienable rights and the consent of the governed?

Write a well-developed paragraph (or two shorter paragraphs) that:

- **Names at least TWO rights or principles** from the lesson
(*Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness, or Consent of the Governed*).
- **Connects each one to a specific government action** described in the text
(*such as limiting speech, punishing criticism, arresting citizens, or jailing people for expressing ideas*).

Handout #3

Directed Note-Taking Graphic Organizer

Directions:

Use this chart to track how the federal government ignored unalienable rights during the enforcement of the Sedition Act of 1798. Record evidence from each paragraph of the text to complete the chart. **Remember:** Some rights may be affected directly, while others are affected when people are punished for expressing ideas or criticism.

Unalienable Right / Principle	Student-Friendly Definition	Evidence from Text Showing Government Action (include paragraph numbers)	Why This Matters Today
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Handout #4

Video Thinking Prompts & Debate Organizer

The Sedition Act, Unalienable Rights, & Consent of the Governed

PART 1: VIDEO NOTES

Video: *The Consent of the Governed*

National Constitution Center, <https://constitutioncenter.org/essays/the-consent-of-the-governed>

Directions: As you watch, jot down your thoughts in the chart below. Listen for how the video explains liberty, rights, and consent of the governed, and connect these ideas to the Sedition Act of 1798 and how the government responded to criticism or speech.

What does the video say about liberty and government?

How is “consent of the governed” explained?

What examples from the video show how people express consent or have a voice in government?

PART 2: DEBATE PREPARATION

Debate Question: Which ignored principle in the text — *Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness, or Consent of the Governed* — created the greatest danger for the people, and why?
(Teacher note: “the people” refers to citizens affected by the Sedition Act.)

My Selected Principle:

- Life
- Liberty
- Pursuit of Happiness
- Consent of the Governed

Directions: Work with your partner to choose ONE principle and prepare your argument using evidence from today’s text about the Sedition Act.

OUR POSITION:

We believe _____ was the most threatened principle because:

REASON 1:

Evidence from the text (paragraph #):

Connection to Lesson 1 grievance:

REASON 2:

Evidence from the text (paragraph #):

Connection to Lesson 1 grievance:

ANTICIPATING OTHER ARGUMENTS

Other Group's Position:

Their Best Argument:

Our Counter-Argument:

Handout #5

Then & Now Comparison Chart

The Sedition Act: Understanding Rights Then and Now

Name: _____

Directions:

Use what you learned in today's lesson to compare what was happening during the **enforcement of the Sedition Act of 1798** with a modern-day example of how citizens use or defend their rights today. Complete each section with clear evidence.

THEN (The Sedition Act – 1798)

What was happening?

(Describe how the government limited speech, punished criticism, or used arrests or jail in response to ideas.)

Which right or principle was most threatened?

(Check one and explain.)

- Life Liberty Pursuit of Happiness Consent of the Governed

Explanation:

NOW (Today)

Modern example:

(Think about voting, peaceful protest, freedom of speech, courts protecting rights, citizens sharing opinions about government, etc.)

How this connects to rights:

(Explain how this modern example helps protect a right or principle that was threatened during the Sedition Act.)

Synthesis Question

What lesson can citizens today learn from the Sedition Act about speaking up and protecting rights when government power is used unfairly?
