

Paving the road ahead

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In this lesson, students will view the award-winning documentary [The Future is Ours: Gen Z Journalists Speak Out](#) from the Journalistic Learning Initiative and examine how youth voices, civic participation, and press freedom shape the evolving “road” to the Constitution.

As the film covers Gen Z just ahead of the 2024 election, it is all about young people claiming agency; Constitution Day is all about understanding the civic framework that gives them that agency; and this year’s theme “Road to the Constitution” binds that all together. The road ahead is for our students to build.

NOTE: JLI recommends teachers watch the documentary prior to showing it to students as it includes news footage and subject matter some viewers may find disturbing.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the Constitution as a living roadmap shaped by each generation, one that students will inherit and shape the course of.
- Analyze how youth agency and storytelling in The Future Is Ours reflect core constitutional principles, especially First Amendment press freedom.
- Connect the documentary’s themes to students’ own roles in paving the path forward for civic life, journalism, and democratic participation.
- Produce a reflective or journalistic piece that ties their voice to the “Road to the Constitution.”

Key Concepts

- **Constitution:** A living framework that guides how power works.
- **First Amendment:** Protects speech, press, assembly, petition, and religion.
- **Free Press:** Ensures transparency and accountability.
- **Youth Agency:** The power young people have to shape civic life.

Lesson Activities

1. Opening journal prompt: “What does it mean to inherit the Constitution?” Ask students to respond briefly to the idea that the Constitution is not just a historical artifact but a roadmap they will follow/travel and eventually maintain.
2. Discuss responses and elaborate on the metaphor.
 - a. The First Amendment and press freedom are guardrails along the road that keep information flowing, prevent abuses of power etc.

- b. Student journalists are the next generation of civil engineers tasked with maintaining the road and paving it further.
3. View the documentary with a focus on the following concepts:
 - a. Youth agency/leadership and their influence
 - b. Storytelling as civic action
 - c. Constitutional principles at work
 - d. Press freedom in action
 - e. Community problem-solving
4. Consider asking students to respond to the following questions as they view the film:
 - a. What part of the documentary felt most connected to the Constitution?
 - b. How do the students in the film use storytelling to influence their communities?
 - c. What constitutional principles (speech, press, petition, assembly) appear in their actions?
 - d. What “cracks in the road” did the young people in the film identify in their community/country?
 - e. Which moments in the documentary show young people “building the road ahead”?
 - f. How does their work mirror what student journalists do in their own program?
5. Closing prompt: Students write a short reflection or produce a journalistic piece considering the role that they and their student media programs play. They could answer any/all the questions below:
 - a. How will my generation shape the future of the Constitution and pave the road ahead?
 - b. What cracks in the road(challenges) to the Constitution does this generation face now? What future challenges might they face in the future?
 - c. What role will journalism — especially student journalism — play in repairing those cracks?
 - d. What part of this democratic road am I responsible for maintaining or improving? Describe ways you can contribute to strengthening democracy through storytelling, civic participation, or journalism.
6. Encourage them to think of themselves as future stewards of constitutional rights, not passive recipients.

Lesson Extensions

- Interview Assignment: Students interview peers about what constitutional rights matter most to them.

- Editorial Writing: Students write an editorial on a local issue through the lens of constitutional principles.
- Press Freedom Case Study: Connect the documentary to real student press freedom cases.
- Community Roadmap: Students design a “Constitution Roadmap” for your school community.

For those who would like to extend this lesson, JIL provides a five-day civic discourse plan on the [documentary site](#).