

# GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

What is the purpose of a “free press”?



## HISTORICAL INQUIRY ACTIVITY

### What is the purpose of a “free press”?

Inquiry Standard	<p>American Government and Civics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SSCG6 Analyze the meaning and importance of each of the rights guaranteed under the Bill of Rights and how each is secured.</li> <li>• SSCG7 Demonstrate knowledge of civil liberties and civil rights.</li> <li>• SSCG18 Examine how American ideals of freedom and democracy protect against the threats of totalitarian ideology.</li> </ul> <p>Journalism I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ELAGSEJ.LE3 Recognize and analyze rights and responsibilities guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Study the interrelationships among the five freedoms: speech, press, religion, assembly and petition.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Information Processing Skills K-12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SSIPS6 Identify and use primary and secondary sources.</li> <li>• SSIPS10 Analyze artifacts.</li> <li>• SSIPS11 Draw conclusions and make generalizations.</li> </ul>
Staging the Compelling Question	<p>Read the printed remarks by James G. Stahlman, <i>A Free Press in a Democracy</i>. Based on this speech, discuss the role and responsibilities of the press. Do you think the role/responsibility of the press has changed from the founding to 1939, or from 1939 to today?</p>

Supporting Q #1	Supporting Q #2	Supporting Q #3
<p>What was the general attitude of the Founders toward the press during the colonial era?</p>	<p>Why did the Founders think freedom of the press was integral to the functioning of a democratic republic?</p>	<p>What factors might constrain the press from presenting information, or influence a biased story?</p>
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Analyze the political cartoon. Describe the	Read the selections from the Founding Fathers and write a summative statement as to	Analyze the political cartoon and the Sedition Act of 1798 and list ways in which the press can be

## HISTORICAL INQUIRY ACTIVITY

“press” as a physical machine and as a group of people. What is the function of each?	why they felt a free press was essential.	swayed from being impartial and/or truthful.
Featured Source	Featured Source	Featured Source
<i>The Tyrant’s Foe, the People’s Friend</i> political cartoon	Federalist #84 <a href="#">Bill of Rights – First Amendment</a> <a href="#">George Mason speech; advocacy of a Bill of Rights</a>	“ <a href="#">Poisoned at the Source</a> ” cartoon <a href="#">Sedition Act of 1789</a>

Summative Performance Task	<p><b>Argument</b></p> <p>Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, short essay) in response to the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from the provided historical resources, while acknowledging competing views.</p> <p><b>Extension</b></p> <p>Review the online exhibit, <i>“Covers Dixie Like the Dew”: A History of Newspaper Journalism in Georgia</i>. Discuss the evolution of newspapers in the state; find one from the 18th or 19th century that was published in your county. Is it still in print? Why or why not?</p>
Taking Informed Action	<p><b>Understand</b></p> <p>Read about the evolution of the media and its impact on American citizens by visiting <a href="#">The Evolution of the Media</a> – Lumen Learning</p> <p><b>Assess</b></p> <p>“Hear it now, see it tonight, read about it tomorrow.” Pre-cable news and the internet, this phrase referred to the three main ways to consume information – radio, television, and the newspaper. Select a single story that occurred between 1950 - 1990 and compare how it is portrayed across the three forms of media.</p> <p><b>Action</b></p> <p>Based on the story you researched, create a meme that reflects your interpretation of the story.</p>

## *HISTORICAL INQUIRY ACTIVITY*

### Overview

#### Inquiry Description

---

This historical inquiry requires students to investigate a series of primary sources related to the freedom of the press to gain a better understanding of the role and responsibilities of the press (media) in a democratic society. It is relevant to both middle and high school standards in civic education.

#### Structure

---

To set the stage for the compelling question, students will read “A Free Press in a Democracy,” a speech given in 1938 by the Nashville Banner editor, James G. Stahlman. The speech will help student gain an understanding of role and responsibilities of the press, as well as the responsibility of “the people” in consuming information. By analyzing various primary sources, students will understand how media has evolved over time and discuss how different media outlets present information.

## HISTORICAL INQUIRY ACTIVITY

### Staging the Compelling Question

Compelling Question	What is the purpose of a “free press”?
Featured Sources	Source A: “A Free Press in a Democracy” pamphlet

### Staging the Compelling Question

---

The view of the Founders was that a free press is essential to the liberty of the people. Read the printed remarks by James G. Stahlman, *A Free Press in a Democracy*. Use a dialectical journal to keep track of your thoughts and questions. Based on this speech, discuss the role and responsibilities of the press. Do you think the role/responsibility of the press has changed from the founding to 1939, or from 1939 to today? Why or why not?

### Excerpt(s)

---

[“A Free Press in a Democracy” pamphlet](#)

### Sources:

Stahlman, James G. “A Free Press in a Democracy” address. Atlanta, GA. November 29, 1928. From the Vertical Files collection at the Georgia Historical Society.

## HISTORICAL INQUIRY ACTIVITY

Supporting Question #1	
Supporting Question	What was the general attitude of the Founders toward the press during the colonial era?
Formative Performance Task	Analyze the political cartoon. Describe the “press” as a physical machine and as a group of people. What is the function of each?
Featured Sources	Source B: “The Tyrant’s Foe; The People’s Friend” political cartoon

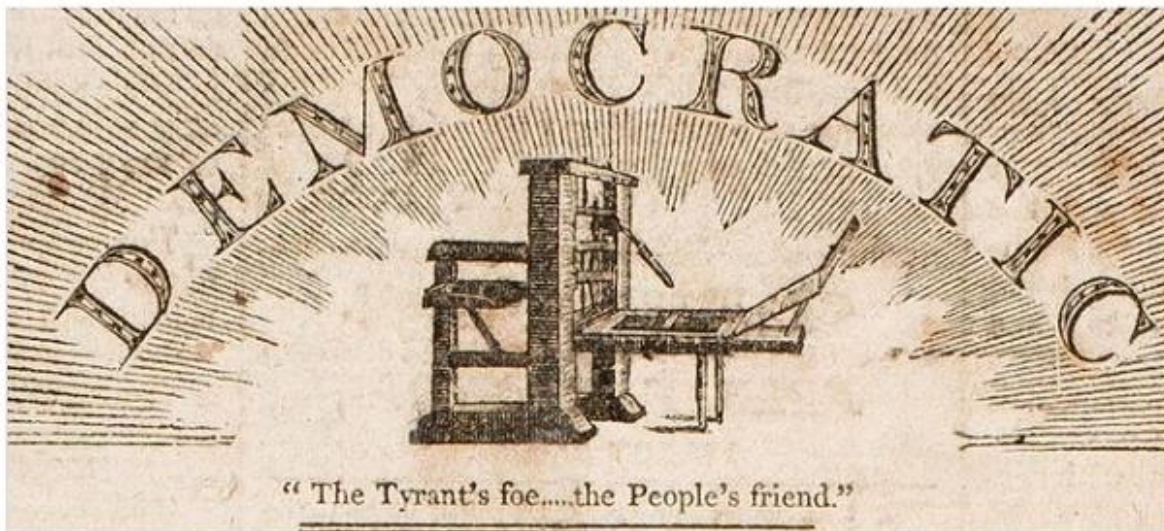
### Formative Performance Task

Analyze the political cartoon using the Library of Congress Primary Analysis Tool. Based on your observations, answer the following questions.

Describe the “press” as a physical machine and as a group of people. What is the function of each?

What additional questions do you have about the press based solely on the political cartoon?

### Excerpt(s)



"The Tyrant's Foe -- The People's Friend," (with image of printing press).  
The Democratic Press, Philadelphia, 1807. The American Antiquarian Society.

## HISTORICAL INQUIRY ACTIVITY

Supporting Question #2	
Supporting Question	Why did the Founders think freedom of the press was integral to the functioning of a democratic republic?
Formative Performance Task	Read the selections from the Founding Fathers and write a summative statement as to why they felt a free press was essential.
Featured Sources	Source C: <a href="#">Federalist #84</a> Source D: <a href="#">Bill of Rights – First Amendment</a> Source E: <a href="#">George Mason speech; advocacy of a Bill of Rights</a>

### Formative Performance Task

---

Read the three selections from the Founders and keep a dialectical journal with your observations and questions. Based on your observations of their writing, write a summative statement as to why the Founders felt a free press was essential to promoting and preserving a democratic form of government.

### Excerpt(s)

---

Source C: [Federalist #84](#) (See Appendix)

Source D: [Bill of Rights – First Amendment](#)

The National Constitution Center website

Source E: [George Mason speech; advocacy of a Bill of Rights](#)

American Battlefield Trust website

## HISTORICAL INQUIRY ACTIVITY

Supporting Question #3	
Supporting Question	What factors might constrain the press from presenting information, or influence a biased story?
Formative Performance Task	Analyze the political cartoon and the Sedition Act of 1798 and list ways in which the press can be swayed from being impartial and/or truthful.
Featured Sources	Source F: <a href="#">“Poisoned at the Source”</a> cartoon Source G: <a href="#">Sedition Act of 1789</a>

### Formative Performance Task

---

Analyze the political cartoon, “Poisoned at the Source” and the Sedition Act of 1798. List ways in which the press can be swayed from being impartial and/or truthful.

### Excerpt(s)

---

Source F: [“Poisoned at the Source”](#) cartoon

From Wikimedia Commons

Source G: [Sedition Act of 1789](#)

The Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University



## HISTORICAL INQUIRY ACTIVITY

Summative Performance Task	
Compelling Question	What is the purpose of a “free press”?
Argument	Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, short essay) in response to the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from the provided historical resources, while acknowledging competing views.
Extension	Review the online exhibit, <i>“Covers Dixie Like the Dew”: A History of Newspaper Journalism in Georgia</i> . Discuss the evolution of newspapers in the state; find one from the 18th or 19th century that was published in your county. Is it still in print? Why or why not?

### Argument

---

Students should be able to explain what a “free press” is and why it was important to the Founders. Additionally, students should be able to explain factors that might impede the press from presenting full and accurate information.

### Extension

---

Using the online exhibit, [“Covers Dixie Like the Dew”](#), create a summary timeline of important milestones of the press/newspapers in the state of Georgia. Is there a local newspaper in your town, city or county? If so, when was it established? How has it changed over time?

Taking Informed Action	
Understand	Read about the evolution of the media and its impact on American citizens by visiting <a href="#">The Evolution of the Media</a> – Lumen Learning
Assess	“Hear it now, see it tonight, read about it tomorrow.” Pre-cable news and the internet, this phrase referred to the three main ways to consume information – radio, television, and the newspaper. Select a single story that occurred between 1950 - 1990 and compare how it is portrayed across the three forms of media.
Action	Based on the story you researched, create a meme that reflects your interpretation of the story.

## *HISTORICAL INQUIRY ACTIVITY*

### Appendices

Access these sources in the Free Press Historical Inquiry Dropbox using [this link](#).

- Source A: “A Free Press in a Democracy” pamphlet
- Source C: Federalist #84
- Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool
- How to Keep a Dialectical Journal

“Covers Dixie Like the Dew” online exhibit from the Digital Library of Georgia. <https://georgia-exhibits.galileo.usg.edu/spotlight/georgia-newspapers/feature/early-georgia-newspapers>