Founding Principle: Inalienable Rights

Day 1
Warm-up [15 minutes]
A. Write the question “Where do our rights come from?” in the center of a piece of butcher paper. Draw a box around it, and then draw three or four lines coming out from the center, dividing the paper into equal pie-pieces or sections. Your paper should look similar to this:

![Diagram](image)

B. Divide students into groups of three or four and give each group one piece of butcher paper prepared as in step A. Have them all use the same color marker to write down their initial responses to the question in the spaces around the question.

C. After students have written their responses, they should discuss their ideas in their groups. Have them look for commonalities among their answers and write those concepts in the center square next to the question “Where do our rights come from?”

D. Reconvene the class, and ask the spokesperson for each group to summarize their responses. Keep a list of main ideas on the board. Responses may seem to cluster around two sources of rights – those which assert rights come “from” government (or other people), and those which assert that rights are natural, inborn, or the gift of God.

Activity [30 minutes]

A. To ensure students have the necessary background knowledge for this unit, have students complete “The Declaration of Independence” lesson from Being an American: Exploring the Ideals that Unite Us.

B. Have students pair up and give each pair a copy of either Handout A or Handout B: Does it Matter Where Rights Come From? Distribute the Handouts A and B equally – students who receive Handout A are “government” and those who receive Handout B are “subjects/citizens.” Have them complete the Handout with their partner.
C. Have students move into groups of four made of “government” and one “subjects/citizens” pairs. The “subjects/citizens” should make their case to each government official and discuss the proposed law. Have students write a list of what they think are the best arguments.

D. Ask students to circulate around the room and review the arguments, putting a check next to the ones they think are strongest.

Wrap-up [15 minutes]

A. Conduct a large group discussion to answer the questions:
   - What is the difference between a “subject” and a “citizen”?
   - Does it matter where rights come from? Why or why not?
   - If rights come from nature or God, can there be an argument that some people have a natural right to rule over others?
   - If there is no natural right for one person or group of people to rule over others, then where must government power come from?

B. Ask students to take a few minutes and return to their original groups from the Warm-Up. Using a different color marker this time, have them write down their responses to the question in the same space as their original response. Use this time to check understanding of the principle that our inalienable rights are part of our nature and are not the grant of government.

C. Students should assess their progression in their journals, connecting what they’ve learned about the principle of Inalienable Rights to their final project. How, if at all, would a proper understanding of this principle guard against the kinds of things that happened to Paul Chambers happening in the U.S.? Have students create a brainstorm web to demonstrate how the principles that all people have creator-endowed inalienable rights safeguards those freedoms.

These instructional materials are in draft form for pilot testing.
Extensions
A. Have students read James Madison’s Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments, and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. They should create a Venn diagram showing the overlap between the arguments about the origin of rights made by Madison and Jefferson and the ones put forth by students in class. The documents can be found here: http://billofrightsinstitute.org/founding-documents/primary-source-documents/

B. Have students read the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Bill of Rights, and the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They should provide a critical analysis comparing the United States’ Founding documents and the UN’s Universal Declaration in regard to ONE of the following three categories:

• The origin of rights
• The role of government
• The treatment of property

Students should decide which document better protects individual liberty, and explain and defend their view in:
• a short essay
• a powerpoint presentation
• a short video

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Handout A: Does it Matter Where Rights Come From?

Directions: Read the information for the scenario. Do you believe the situation describes is consistent with the principle that everyone is born with certain inalienable rights?

Most of the American colonies and, later, the states, had established religions through the early 19th century. This meant that there was one official religion in those places. That official religion was often supported through taxation. All the colonies and states had their own different policies, but in most places this meant that religious “toleration” was practiced. The word toleration refers to an official government policy. Toleration meant that the state governments allowed people of other religions (or no religion) to live in the state and practice their religions within certain legal limits.

In our judgment, this description is / is not (circle one) consistent with the principle that everyone is born with certain inalienable rights.

Explain:

If you were petitioning government for a change in this policy, what kinds of change(s) would you propose, and what arguments would you make to support your proposal?
Handout B: Does it Matter Where Rights Come From?

Directions: With your partner, discuss questions below and fill in your responses.

1. Imagine you are a member of the royal family in another country. You believe that rights come from the government. A member of your advisory council comes to you with an idea for a new law granting certain rights to members of the religious majority, and restricting the privileges of religious minorities. In order to decide whether this proposal is just, what questions might you ask?

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2. Imagine you are an elected lawmaker. You believe that all people are born with inherent rights, because those rights come from God or from nature. A member of your legislative staff comes to you with an idea for a new law granting certain rights to members of the religious majority, and restricting the privileges of religious minorities. In order to decide whether this proposal is just, what questions might you ask?

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