



Unit 6

Religious Freedom

Mock Trial

(Singh v. Booth)

These materials are modified and excerpted from Singh v. Carter, 168 F. Supp. 3d (D.D.C. 2016). More information—including summaries and documents—available [here](#).

Unit 6
Religious Freedom Mock Trial (*Singh v. Booth*)

Unit Questions

How has Congress interpreted the First Amendment’s freedom of religion clause? Can we impose limits on religious freedom? If so, when and how can we do so?

Length of Unit

This unit consists of seven one-hour class sessions.

Overview

In this unit, students will participate in a mock trial that explores the rights and restrictions on individuals attempting to practice their own religion. Students will first familiarize themselves with the Religious Freedom and Restoration Act (“RFRA”), which was intended to further protect First Amendment rights. Students will then read and analyze case documents adapted from a real federal court case, *Singh v. Carter*, which involved a conflict between a soldier’s desire to exercise his religious practices and the U.S. Army’s interest in protecting its soldiers through uniform and safety requirements.

After learning about the relevant law and facts, students will participate in a mock trial that will allow them to use their knowledge to persuade judges to find either that the soldier’s religious practice is protected by RFRA, or that the Army has an overriding safety concern that forbids the soldier from exercising his religion. The mock trial allows students to assume roles as members of the plaintiff’s team, members of the defendant’s team, neutral judges, or impartial courtroom participants. This allows every student to have a substantive role in deciding or observing a dispute that remains pertinent today. Students engage in the authentic tasks of examining and weighing evidence, and using facts and evidence to formulate and present claims.

Unit Objectives and Standards

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Explain issues related to religious freedom in the United States, including disagreements regarding the extent of religious freedom in various contexts.
 - [NSCG II.D.3](#), [NSCG II.D.4](#), [NSCG II.D.5](#)
 - [MI-HSCE 2.2.3](#), [MI-HSCE 2.2.5](#), [MI-HSCE 3.4.4](#)
- Analyze and weigh evidence in the case of *Singh v. Booth*.
 - [MI-HSCE 6.1.3](#)
- Use evidence to formulate and deliver an argument in the case of *Singh v. Booth*.

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- [MI-HSCE 6.1.5](#)
- Evaluate the trial process as well as the decision in *Singh v. Booth* to determine the degree to which justice was served in the case.
 - [NSCG III.D.1](#), [NSCG III.D.2](#), [NSCG V.B.1](#), [NSCG V.B.5](#)
 - [MI-HSCE 2.2.2](#)

Anticipated Student Understanding/Challenges to Understanding

For students to participate a mock trial, they should have some background on court procedures. These are addressed most fully in Unit 1 on this website.

This unit of instruction assumes that students have already studied fundamental values and principles of America's constitutional republic (including justice/desert, due process, equal protection, and the rule of law), and that they have some understanding of the various levels and responsibilities of courts in the federal and state judicial system.

Materials Provided

What we provide:

- Unit readings and handouts
- Access to documents from [Singh v. Carter](#)

What you provide:

- Physical copies of suggested documents from the case, plus any additional documents you'd like to include.

Unit Assessment

- Students will participate in a mock trial.

References

- Alexandra M. Ashbrook, [StreetLaw's Classroom Guide to Mock Trials and Moot Courts](#) (2004).
- Amy E. Lerman & Vesla M. Weaver, [Arresting Citizenship: The Democratic Consequences of American Crime Control](#) (2014).
- Michael E. Tigar, [Huck Finn, The River and Trying Your Case](#) (2014).
- Michael E. Tigar, [Nine Principles of Litigation and Life](#) (2014).

Lessons

Lesson 1: Introduction to Religious Freedom

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Students will review the historical context of religious freedom of expression and explore modern issues in the practice of religious freedom.

Students will be able to:

- Articulate ways in which an individual's freedom of religious expression may be restricted.
- Explain the nature, facts and issues of *Singh v. Booth*.

Lesson 2: Articulating and Applying the Law

Students will analyze the contours of the First Amendment's free exercise clause and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and apply the law to various fact patterns.

Students will be able to:

- Articulate the religious freedom test as described in the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.
- Identify courts' interpretations of compelling government interests and least restrictive means of enforcing those interests.
- Apply the law to the facts of *Singh v. Booth*.

Lesson 3: Understanding the Evidence

Students will conduct a close reading of the evidence and analyze how available evidence supports either the plaintiff or defendant's case.

Students will be able to:

- Analyze and make connections between pieces of evidence for a trial.
- Craft an argument about the fairness of the pretrial process.

Lesson 4: Developing a Theory of the Case

Students will work in groups to organize and develop their arguments and create a theory of the case.

Students will be able to:

- Develop a clear outline of the case of *Singh v. Booth*.
- Articulate a theory of the case based on available evidence.

Lesson 5: Preparing for Trial

Students will be assigned and prepare for their roles in the mock trial.

Students will be able to:

- Prepare questions and documents for a mock trial.

Lesson 6: The Trial

Students will participate in the mock trial.

Lesson 7: Debrief and Reflection

Students will reflect on the mock trial through written responses and class discussion.

Students will be able to:

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- Evaluate the degree to which the civil rights litigation system balances an individual's freedom of religious expression against competing government interests in the United States.