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Date _____



The Bill of Rights

Today we're going to talk about the Bill of Rights... in just a minute.

While drafting the Constitution, the Framers couldn't agree on how to distribute power. The first 10 amendments, or the Bill of Rights, were a compromise: They keep the federal government in check by ensuring individual liberties and empowering states to create their own laws.

The First Amendment prohibits Congress from interfering with freedom of speech, religion, press, and assembly.

The Second Amendment guarantees the right to bear arms. Today there is some debate around the Framers' original intent and whether it's still relevant in modern times.

The Third Amendment restricts the quartering of soldiers in private homes, and rarely comes up today.

The next five amendments address the rights of the accused. The Fourth prohibits law enforcement from searching your home or taking your belongings without a warrant. The Fifth says defendants have the right to due process. The Sixth and Seventh guarantee the right to a trial by jury in criminal and civil cases, respectively. And the Eighth bars excessive fines, as well as punishments deemed "cruel and unusual."

The Ninth and Tenth Amendments are less specific. The Ninth states that just because a right isn't outlined in the Constitution doesn't mean it isn't a right. And the Tenth says any powers that aren't granted to the federal government by the Constitution are reserved for the states.

Which amendment do you think is most important in the United States today?