

# e-Edition Plus

A current events feature for teaching with electronic editions.

By Emilia Pastina

## Rosary beads put new focus on dress codes in U.S. schools

Clothes, shoes, jewelry and other accessories are ways kids and teens express their individualism.

Some say this is a constitutional right, protected under the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of speech and expression.

Others say it can lead to peer pressure, social and economic divisions and even violence in schools and communities.

In a New York State public school, religious rosary beads are at the center of a new debate over what kids have the right to wear.

Last May, 13-year-old Raymond Hosier was told by school administrators at the Oneida Middle School in Schenectady that he couldn't wear his rosary beads outside of his shirt because that would violate the school's student dress code policy.

One part of that policy declares that a student's appearance may "not denote, represent or be deemed to be gang related, included but not limited to bandanas, colors, flags or beads."

The seventh-grader wore the rosary beads again and was suspended. The school said that the beads, which are commonly used by members of the Catholic Church, could be a gang symbol. But the teen said the beads were a declaration of his faith and made him feel close to his older brother and an uncle, who both had died.

In June, the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of the student and his mother, claiming that the school policy was a "violation of freedoms of speech and expression guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution."

The ACLJ also charged that the teen was denied due process and legal rights guaranteed by the Constitution's Fifth, Sixth and 14th Amendments.

Now, three months after the teen was told not to show the rosary beads, the school district has said it will change the policy and allow him to wear the religious symbol at school.

### Dress code controls

Most U.S. public schools have dress codes and some even require mandatory uniforms.

Some dress codes have been challenged in courts, but rulings have come down on both sides of whether they are constitutional.

The U.S. Supreme Court has never heard a case on school dress codes.

But one big case is cited by both opponents and supporters of dress codes.

### Protest ruling

The case was in 1969 and involved schools in Des Moines, Iowa, which had banned the wearing of armbands in protest of the Vietnam War. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 7-2 that the school could not censor student expression unless officials could reasonably predict it would disrupt school activities.

Dress-code opponents say the ruling shows students have the right to wear clothes with messages, while supporters say the ruling makes a distinction between "type of clothing" and "free-speech interests," according to the national First Amendment Center.

Other federal courts have ruled that dress codes are constitutional if they are authorized by state law, advance an important government interest, are not related directly to blocking free expression or only restrict free expression in a minimal way.



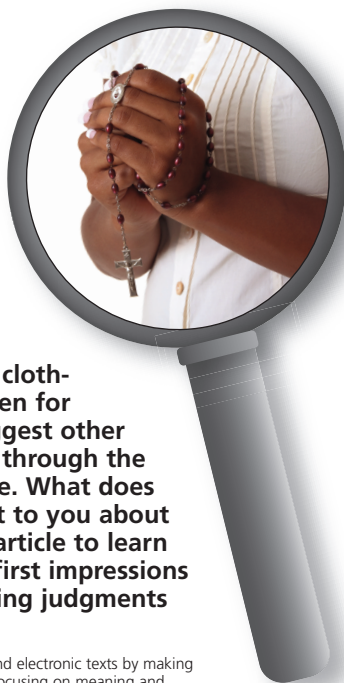
A school's decision to suspend a student who wore religious rosary beads was challenged in court as a violation of rights guaranteed in the Constitution.

# Talk About the News

- **The U.S. Constitution protects Americans' rights to free speech and expression. As a class, discuss what you believe the writers of the First Amendment intended to protect. Discuss if and how freedom of speech and expression can be taken too far. Together, come up with a list of responsibilities people should have when expressing their individualism.**

Learning Standards: Engaging peers in constructive conversation about matters of public concern by clarifying issues, considering opposing views, applying democratic values, anticipating consequences and working toward making decisions.

# Explore Your e-Edition



- **Sometimes self-expressions, such as clothing or religious items, can be mistaken for symbols of gang membership or suggest other negative or violent intentions. Look through the e-Edition to find a photo of someone. What does their clothing or appearance suggest to you about their character or beliefs? Read the article to learn more about this person. Were your first impressions right? What are the dangers of making judgments based on how someone looks?**

Learning Standards: Responding to a variety of visual, written and electronic texts by making connections to students' personal lives and the lives of others; focusing on meaning and communication while listening, speaking, viewing, reading and writing in personal, social, occupational and civic contexts.

- **Many U.S. schools have adopted dress codes or uniform policies. Read the e-Edition to find examples of rules that students, employees or citizens must follow. Write a blog or journal entry about why such laws, rules and policies are needed and what would happen if these codes didn't exist.**
- **Some say that self-expression is protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. However, many believe if this right is abused it can get out of hand. Read the e-Edition to find an example of someone who abused a right. Or find an example online. Write a letter to the editor about the responsibilities that come with one of the rights in the news.**

Learning Standards: Explaining how the rule of law protects individual rights and serves the common good.

Learning Standards: Exploring and reflecting on universal themes and substantive issues from oral, visual, and written texts.

# How Well Did You Read?

Understanding what you read is a skill that will help you all through life. Review the story about school dress codes by answering the questions below.

- 1. According to the story, a middle school student was told he couldn't wear religious rosary beads to school because they could:**
  - A. Hurt the feelings of non-Christians
  - B. Get stolen
  - C. Be a sign of a gang
  - D. Lead to peer pressure
- 2. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects Americans' right to:**
  - A. Free speech and expression
  - B. Due process
  - C. Birthright citizenship
  - D. All of the above
- 3. The Fifth, Sixth and 14th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution protect Americans' rights to:**
  - A. Free speech and expression
  - B. Due process & other legal rights
  - C. Birthright citizenship
  - D. All of the above
- 4. According to the story, some people believe that certain clothes worn to school could lead to:**
  - A. Peer pressure
  - B. Social and economic division
  - C. Violence
  - D. All of the above
- 5. According to the story, the U.S. Supreme Court has:**
  - A. Ruled in favor of schools in school dress code cases
  - B. Ruled in favor of students in school dress code cases
  - C. Heard more than 100 cases on school dress codes
  - D. Never heard a case on school dress codes