



# Graphic Organizers

**Created to help increase awareness of importance of open government and freedom of information**

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# Sunshine Week

## Graphic Organizers

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## Know the Terms

Match these words and phrases with the appropriate definitions below:

	Terms	Letter of the correct definition
1	Freedom of Information Act	
2	Freedom of the Press	
3	Inalienable Right	
4	Democracy	
5	Committee on Open Government	
6	Transparency	
7	Exemption	
8	Record	
9	Executive Session	
10	Open Meeting	

- A. A right according to natural law, a right that cannot be taken away, denied or transferred
- B. A form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and either exercised directly by them or through freely elected representatives
- C. The right to publish newspapers, magazines and other printed matter without prior governmental restriction
- D. Not subject to or release from an obligation or duty
- E. The full, accurate and timely disclosure of information
- F. Responsible for overseeing and advising with regard to the Freedom of Information Law, the Open Meetings Law and the Personal Privacy Protection Law in New York state.
- G. A federal law enacted in 1966 requiring that government records, except those relating to national security, confidential financial data and law enforcement, be made available to the public on request
- H. Any information kept, held, filed, produced or reproduced by, with or for an agency in any form whatsoever.
- I. The official convening of a public body for the purpose of conducting public business
- J. A portion of an open meeting during which the public may be excluded

**Follow up:** Look through the newspaper for current examples of these terms. Which did you find? Which proved difficult to find? What one new thing did you learn from this activity?

**Public Documents in the News**

Look through the newspaper (print or electronic) for articles that refer to information obtained from public records – for example: police reports, school board or city council meeting briefs, state or national budget/financial records. Select one article and answer the following questions.

What are the key facts reported in this article? \_\_\_\_\_

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If freedom of information laws didn't exist, which of these facts would not be known? Why?

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What issue in society is being addressed by having this information known publicly?

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How does this issue affect you? \_\_\_\_\_

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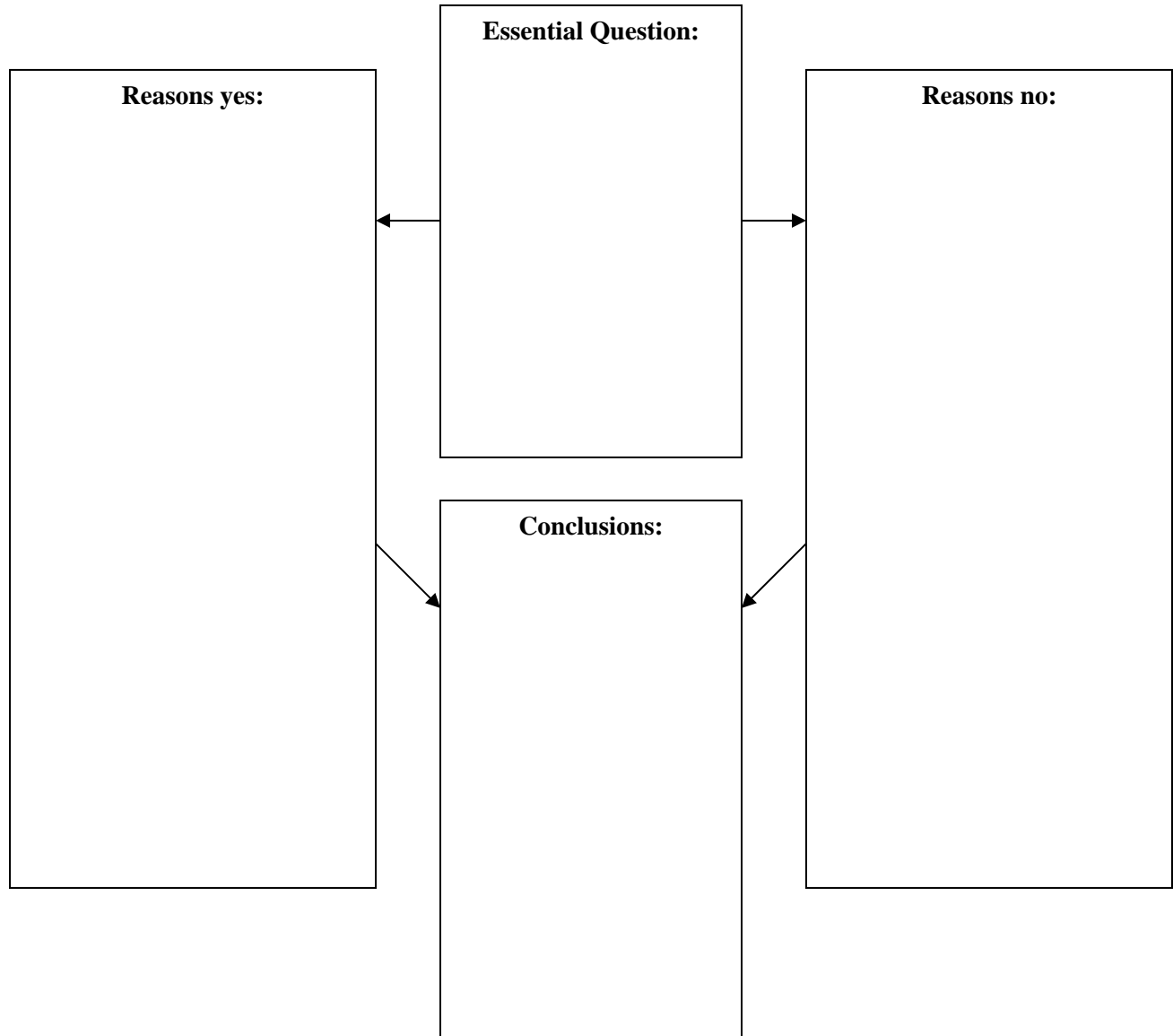
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**Follow up:** Share your observations with the class. What did you learn by completing this activity?

## Writing an Editorial: My Right to Know

After reviewing the Freedom of Information Act (1966) or New York State’s open government laws, working with a small group of students, decide what public record you’d like to have access to. Under the law do you have a right to that information? Review several newspaper editorials paying close attention to the writing style and content. Now write your own editorial defending your right to know. Prepare an outline before writing. First, choose and write an “essential question” such as – Should citizens have access to the public record you selected? List reasons citizens and leaders give for answering “yes” or “no” to the question. Be sure to back up your conclusion/opinion with facts.



**Follow up:** Can you think of instances when information should be kept secret? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of keeping information from the public.

This activity was originally developed for *Community Connections with Geography and the Newspaper* curriculum guide for the NAA Foundation by Dr. Sandra Cook.

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## **Editorial Cartoon**

Now that you have a better understanding of the importance of open government and freedom of information create your own editorial cartoon for Sunshine Week. If editorial cartoons are new to you, you might want to learn more them before you start. Visit the Association of American Editorial Cartoonist's website *Cartoons for the Classroom* at <http://nieonline.com/aaec/cftc.cfm>.

**Follow-up:** Display the finished cartoons on a class bulletin board. Was this assignment harder or easier than you expected it would be? Why?

## Sunshine Poem

Now that you know more about the principles of Sunshine Week, why not write a poem about it? Acrostics are a fun poetic form that anyone can write. The first letters of each line spell out a word or phrase, in this case SUNSHINE. Each line in the poem should describe the main topic, Sunshine Week – open government and freedom of information.

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**Follow-up:** Display the finished poems on a class bulletin board. Was this assignment harder or easier than you expected it would be? Why?

## The “Public Watchdog”

Look through the newspaper, print or digital, for examples of the news media acting as the “public watchdog.” These stories could be at the national, state or local level. Select stories about each of the levels of government listed below. Explain why it is important for citizens to know about the news reported in the stories.

Government official/group	Which story?	Why citizens should be informed
National elected official (The President or a member of Congress)		
State elected official (The governor, state lawmaker)		
Local elected official (Mayor, city council representative, etc.)		
Local governmental group (Zoning commission, waste authority)		
Tax supported service agency (Human service agencies)		

**Follow-up:** Look at the information on your chart. Which of the articles is most important to you as a citizen? Discuss your ideas with another student.

This activity was originally developed for *Citizens Together: You and Your Newspaper* curriculum guide written by Sherrye Dee Garrett, Ed.D. and Beverly S. Morrison, Ph.D. for the Newspaper Association of America Foundation.



## **The First Amendment – Freedoms of Speech and the Press**

People make their voices known in our government directly such as in congressional hearings, and indirectly through letters to their representatives in Congress. Other indirect methods to influence change include the use of newspapers and other media. Letters to the editor, political cartoons, press releases and even newspaper advertising are all vehicles used to sway public opinion and potential voters. Select one of the newspaper methods listed and create a persuasive argument based on a local issue in the news. Be sure to use facts to strengthen their point of view.

**Follow-up:** Select an interesting editorial from the newspaper and write a new editorial expressing the opposite point of view.

## **Reporting without the Freedoms of the First Amendment**

Locate articles, editorials or political cartoons that focus on the decisions or actions of local, state or national government officials. As a class, discuss how this information would be different without the protections of in the Constitution and other Shield Laws. Rewrite or redraw this coverage as it might be reported without the First Amendment.

**Follow-up:** Briefly write how the Freedom of Speech and the Press are important to you.

**Web resources:**

FOIA lesson plans for high school students - <https://sites.google.com/site/foiahelp/foia-lesson-plan-for-high-school-teachers>

Media Ethics: Where Do You Draw the Line? A Case Study Approach to Understanding News Coverage and Journalistic Decision-Making. For Students and Teachers in High School and College by Rosalind G. Stark for The Newseum. This teaching package, for teachers and students in high school and college, has been developed to give students an in-depth look at the media in the United States, with an emphasis on the values, standards, and practices of good journalism. Several lessons specifically focus on the balance between freedom of personal privacy protection and freedom of information and the press. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED458164>

Your "Right to Know:" Sunshine Laws & the Freedom of Information Act - Although created by the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium [www.civics.org](http://www.civics.org) for the Sunshine Center of the NC Open Government Coalition [www.ncopengov.org](http://www.ncopengov.org) these lesson plans could be adapted for use in NYS replacing any reference to state law with NYS FOIL and OML as basis for discussion. - <http://bit.ly/1wjIKJg>

Student Press Law Center article about FOIA for student journalists - <http://www.splc.org/article/2014/08/know-your-rights-freedom-of-information>

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (1966) - <http://www.foia.gov/about.html>

Electronic Freedom of Information Act amendments (1996) - <http://www.balancedscorecard.org/EFOIA/tabid/113/Default.aspx>

National Security Archive Freedom of Information Act website - <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/foia.html>

New York State Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) - <http://www.dos.state.ny.us/coog/foil2.html>

New York State Committee on Open Government - <http://www.dos.state.ny.us/coog/>

**Answers to Know the Terms on Page 3:**

Matchups: 1,G; 2,C; 3,A; 4,B; 5,F; 6,E; 7,D; 8,H; 9,J; 10,I