

**Title:** How to Create a Law

**Corresponding Student Center Pages:** The Role of the Federal Courts; Law and the Rule of Law

**Age Level:** Grades 4-12

**Suggested Time Needed:** 1-3 class periods

**Description:** This lesson plan will help you to explain what a law is, and the factors that may contribute to writing laws in society. It can be done as an individual or group activity, with teacher introduction and wrap up.

**Educational Objectives:**

After completing this activity, students will:

- Be able to define the term law.
- Be able to identify some of the values, morals, or other concerns upon which societies base their laws.
- Use language skills to write a law of their own.

**Guiding Questions:**

- What is a law?
- How do laws impact your daily life as a student?
- Is a law different from a rule? If so, how?
- What guidelines or values should a government use when creating laws?

**Missouri Grade Level and Course Level Expectations:**

- Knowledge of Principles and Processes of Governance Systems - Explain how laws and rules are made, enforced, changed and interpreted.
- Identify and use library and media sources for social science inquiry.

**Materials List:**

- Whiteboard/chalkboard/smartboard for teacher use
- Access to laptops or computer lab and the internet
- Handout 1
- Handout 2

**Procedure:**

1. Place students into groups of 2, 3, or 4 depending on your class size.
2. Place the word LAW on the board, then ask students in each group to write a definition of the word. Allow 2-5 minutes for this process.
3. Once all groups are finished, ask them to share their definitions. How did they define law?
4. Read them the definition of LAW from a dictionary:  
**A law is a rule that binds all people living in a community. Laws protect our general safety, and ensure our rights as citizens against abuses by other people, organizations, and even from the government itself.**
5. Next, while still working in their groups, have the students think about laws that impact them on a daily basis.
6. Have them make a list of ALL the laws that they can think of that affect them each day, from the time they get up, until they go to bed at night. You may want to prompt them a bit to get them talking.
  - Can you think of school rules like dress codes, behavioral guidelines that you must follow, that are similar to laws?
  - Can you think of state or local government regulations that affect your daily life? Who says you must go to school? Think about how you get to school each day, and any related laws about transportation.
  - What do you wear, what do you eat, did you brush your teeth this morning? Are there any laws that govern these sorts of things?
7. Allow about 5 minutes, and then ask the groups to share their responses. The teacher or a student volunteer can place these on the board. Separate “school rules” for “laws” on the board.
8. Once you have a class list, talk to students about the number of rules and laws we are exposed to each day. Ask them to talk about the following questions.
  - Based on your list, are you as a student MOST affected by school rules or state and national laws?
    - Answers here may vary by age group. Grade school students who do not drive may not have a sense of interacting with local, state, and national laws as much as high school students.
  - What do most of the local/state/national laws that you listed do? Is their purpose to restrict your activity? To protect you? Why?
9. Now, lead a brief class discussion. Ask students:
  - a. What sort of guidelines should the government (local, state or national) use when making laws?
  - b. What factors go into the creation of laws? Students might say:
    - To protect us.
    - To encourage certain behaviors, this might mean that the government is pursuing certain shared morals and values in society.
    - To discourage certain behaviors, again this might mean that government is pursuing such laws because our shared values have dictated that certain behaviors are anti-social, or bad (murder, rape, robbery, etc.).

- Our shared morals and values in a society; for example public decency laws.
  - Ask students when they think the government should act and when they think people should be able to decide things for themselves?
- c. You may want to begin or end this discussion by looking at some specific examples of recent laws that seek to “protect” but which might be considered as going too far. **Examples below.**

**Examples from State Laws:**

**New York City:** Consider a recently enacted ban on the sale of extra-large sodas or sugar filled soft drinks.

- New York Times Article detailing the ban:
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/14/nyregion/health-board-approves-bloombergs-soda-ban.html>

**Tunica, Mississippi:** Consider a law banning saggy pants. The city already had a public decency law that banned showing ones “breasts or genitals,” but the new law also prohibits citizens from “wearing pants below the hips” if the persons “skin or undergarments” might be exposed.

- WMCTV News Tunica story:
- <http://www.wmctv.com/story/15637456/tunica-ms-bans-saggy-pants-that-hang-too-low>

**Little Rock, Arkansas:** Consider a possible ban on texting and walking. Is this a dangerous activity that should be curbed by government?

- Associated Press via ABC News Channel 5 story on the proposed law:
- [http://www.newsnet5.com/dpp/news/local\\_news/walking-and-texting-ban](http://www.newsnet5.com/dpp/news/local_news/walking-and-texting-ban)

**Example from National Law:**

**Obscene Language:** Should citizens be able to use foul language on television or on the radio? The FCC (Federal Communications Commission) has guidelines against such usage. The U.S. Supreme Court recently heard the case *Federal Communications Commission vs. Fox Television Stations*, in which Fox Television sued over fines they were forced to pay for violating FCC regulations.

Who has the right to decide what language we should hear? If a movie star or recording artist uses foul language at an awards show, should the producers of the show or the television station be fined or held responsible? Should the government be able to limit the speech of television, music, or movie writers to limit their use of foul language? Or, is it up to consumers, those watching and listening to decide what they want to hear, and to watch or listen as they see fit?

**Forbes article on the Court’s decision:**

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelbobelian/2012/06/21/supreme-court-follows-a-narrow-path-in-indecency-case/>

**PBS Newshour recap of the Court’s decision:**

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/law/jan-june12/scotus\\_06-21.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/law/jan-june12/scotus_06-21.html)

**FCC Communications Guidelines:**

<http://www.fcc.gov/guides/obscenity-indecency-and-profanity>

***FCC vs. Pacifica Foundation (1978)*, precedent setting case on the use of profanity on t.v. and radio:**

[http://www.oyez.org/cases/1970-1979/1977/1977\\_77\\_528](http://www.oyez.org/cases/1970-1979/1977/1977_77_528)

**10. Conclusion.** Lead a discussion with these follow up questions:

- Why do governments (local, state or national) feel the need to regulate what citizens may view as personal behavior?
- Do these behaviors pose a threat or danger? To whom? If they don't pose a danger, should such activities be regulated? Why or why not?
- What are the concerns of government in these cases? Do they have merit?
- Should people know that these actions might be harmful? Should they take action on their own, or do they need a law to limit their actions? Why or why not?
- What are the consequences of creating such laws? Of NOT creating such laws?

**11. Review the Guiding Questions**

- What is a law?
- How do laws impact your daily life as a student?
- Is a law different from a rule? How?
- What sort of guidelines or values should a government use when creating laws?

**12. OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS**

- a. **Continuing the Group Work Above:** Have students return to their groups, and then reflecting on the class discussion, have each group write a law. Their law should target an area of concern for the students, an area in which they think laws are absent or not working today.
- You might allow students to publish their laws (on a bulletin board, or online blog posting, etc.)
  - Once the laws are written, have the groups share them with the class, and use the following questions to lead a follow up discussion.
    - What is their reason for making this law?
    - What do they hope to gain, fix, or solve?
    - Does the law protect someone or something? If so, what?
    - Does the law protect a right or liberty? If so, for whom?
- b. **Written Assignment:** Have students use their laptops or the school's computer lab to look for examples of local laws that seek to inhibit what we might consider personal behaviors.
- Students may want to begin by expanding on the examples already given. Examples include laws about food restrictions (ie. banning fast food restaurants, large sodas), smoking laws, clothing related laws, laws about using iPods/cell phones/texting while walking, driving, or biking. All of these are examples of laws passed recently in local municipalities. A general internet search should provide students with multiple examples.
  - Student could then evaluate the laws. Do they think they are credible, do they go too far? What action or behavior is the local government seeking to stop or regulate and why?
    - This evaluation could be a written assignment, 3 paragraph essay
    - See Handout 1
- c. **Political Cartoon:** This activity asks students to find laws similar to those used in the class discussion above, then to create a political cartoon reflecting their views of the law that they found.
- See Handout 2

**Handout 1: How to Create a Law Activity – *an analytical essay***

**Directions:** In class today we talked about what a law is, and looked at some of the things that governments have to consider when making laws. For example:

- Governments must think of public safety, and how can they keep people safe.
- Governments consider the values and morality of the public, and create laws that seek to promote these common values.
- Governments seek to regulate business, to ensure they operate within the laws and are not doing things to endanger people (food safety, product safety laws).

We discussed some examples of how local governments have, in the past, created laws that seek to regulate the personal behavior of citizens. Can they drink super-sized soda? Can they wear saggy pants? Can they use their phone to text and walk at the same time?

Use a computer and go online to find examples of municipalities (towns or cities) that have created laws that seek to govern the behavior of their citizens. You might find laws about similar topics to those discussed in class, but you may find other examples as well. You may want to try searching for:

- Laws banning soda, fast food, fast food restaurants.
- Laws about texting and driving, biking, walking.
- Laws about cell phone use when driving, biking, and walking.
- Laws about iPod or MP3 player use then driving, biking, walking.
- Laws about dress codes, how to dress, what to wear.

Find at least one example of a law that we did not talk about in our class discussion. Then write an essay in which you:

- 1. Describe the law that was passed. Include information such as:**
  - a. Who passed the law, and when?
  - b. What are the contents of the law, what does it do, what behaviors does it regulate?
  - c. Who is the target of the law (all people, adults, teens, etc.)?
- 2. EVALUATE the law. Consider questions such as:**
  - a. Does this law seem necessary, why or why not?
  - b. Does this law legitimately protect society? From what? How?
  - c. Does this law go too far? Does it seek to regulate something that people should be able to regulate for themselves? Should common sense be the guide here and not government intervention? Why or why not?

**Formulate a 3-4 paragraph essay, which includes:**

- A. An INTRODUCTION:** Introduce your essay topic, and the example you chose.
- B. A BODY:** Include 1-2 paragraphs where you explain the details of the law you chose for your example, AND in which you EVALUATE that law. You should use SPECIFIC examples from the law, and from your source, to support the claims made in your essay.
- C. A CONCLUSION:** Give a brief overview of the facts you have stated.
- D. Add a WORKS CITED PAGE:** Give credit to the source of your information, and make sure that you use in-text citations when you quote or paraphrase from your source.
- E. Include a PRINTED COPY OF THE ARTICLE** you used, stapled to the back of your paper.

**This Assignment is due:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Handout 2: How to Create a Law Activity – *drawing a political cartoon***

**Directions:** In class today we talked about what a law is, and looked at some of the things that governments have to consider when making laws. For example:

- Governments must think of public safety, and how can they keep people safe.
- Governments consider the values and morality of the public, and create laws that seek to promote these common values.
- Governments seek to regulate business, to ensure they operate within the laws and are not doing things to endanger people (food safety, product safety laws).

We discussed some examples of how local governments have, in the past, created laws that seek to regulate the personal behavior of citizens. Can they drink super-sized soda? Can they wear saggy pants? Can they use their phone to text and walk at the same time?

1. Use the internet to view this example political cartoon:

<http://www.politicalcartoons.com/cartoon/d325d55b-c260-4284-9402-880c24cf68b5.html#pricing>

Source: This cartoon is by R. McKee (from the *Augusta Chronicle*)

The cartoon above is one reaction to the recent ban on super-sized sodas in New York City. Such cartoons often use **satire** to make an **editorial comment** about the actions of government.

2. Answer these questions:

- a. What do you think the cartoonist is trying to say about the soda ban in New York City?
- b. Do you agree or disagree with the message portrayed in the cartoon above? Why or why not? Please explain.

3. Use a computer and go online to find examples of municipalities (towns or cities) or states that have created laws that seek to govern the behavior of their citizens. You might find laws about similar topics to those discussed in class, but you may find other examples as well. You may want to try searching for:

- Laws banning soda, fast food, fast food restaurants.
- Laws about texting and driving, biking, walking.
- Laws about cell phone use when driving, biking, and walking.
- Laws about iPod or MP3 player use then driving, biking, walking.
- Laws about dress codes, how to dress, what to wear.

**4. Please PRINT a copy of the ARTICLE you found, and attach it to this worksheet before handing it in.**

**5. Use the article you found to answer the following questions:**

- a. What kind of behavior or activity does this law seek to ban or regulate?
- b. Is this a LOCAL law, or a STATE law – circle the one that applies.
- c. What do you think this law is intended to protect? Or how is it intended to benefit people in the state or municipality? Please explain fully.

**6. Use a piece of BLANK paper and design your own political cartoon around the law that your article described.**

- Remember, political cartoons are editorial in nature, meaning they reflect the opinion of the cartoonist. Therefore, you should take a side, and make a statement with your cartoon. Are you for or against the law suggested by your article?
- You will be graded on content, not artistic ability.

**This Assignment is due:** \_\_\_\_\_