

No Vehicles in the Park

Making Clear, Fair Rules

Overview

Objectives

Students will:

- Compare and contrast the “letter of the law” with the intent of the law by using critical thinking *skills* to evaluate hypothetical situations.
- Become aware of the difficulties involved in devising clear, fair laws.

Materials

- Handout A: Evaluating Rules
 - One per student
- Handout B: No Vehicles in the Park
 - One per student
- Handout C: Class Discussion Self-Assessment
 - One per student

Notes:

This lesson was adapted from an activity developed by Arlene Gallagher and Leigh Taylor for Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago’s VOICE curriculum. It was first published in an article, “Premises for Law,” by Arlene Gallagher, in *Social Education* (Vol. 39, No. 3).

Procedure

A. Focus

1. Ask your students why they think we have rules. (*Answers may include: to keep people safe, so people know what they are supposed to do, etc.*)
2. Tell your students that you are going to make a new rule for the class. Display or write on the board:
“You can only use nice colors in your drawings.”
3. Ask your students if they think this is a good rule for the class. Call on 3-4 students to share their opinions.
If necessary, ask prompting questions like:
 - Is this rule fair?
 - Is it easy to follow?
 - Is it addressing a problem we have in class?
4. Tell your students that today they will be learning how to evaluate rules and laws to see if they are effective, and how to create clear, fair rules and laws.

B. Reading

1. Distribute **Handout A: Evaluating Rules** to each student. Review each list item under question 1 and check for student understanding. Tell your students that after considering the questions in question 1, they are ready to decide if a rule should be kept, eliminated, or changed.
2. Ask your students to look back at the drawing rule on the board and ask each question from question 1. Then, ask by show of hands if

they think the rule should be kept, eliminated, or changed. Ask 2-3 students to share what they would change about the rule.

B. Reading (continued)

3. Distribute a copy of **Handout B: No Vehicles in the Park** to each student. Tell them that they are going to evaluate a rule that was made about the park in the city of Central Heights.
4. Ask them to first read the story, then each of the seven possible exceptions to the rule. Then, for each of the seven possible exceptions, decide whether they would grant the exception or not. Let them know that they will be discussing their answers in small groups, so they should be prepared to say why they feel that way.
5. Give students 5-10 minutes to read the story and make their decisions.

C. Discussion

1. Organize students into groups of four or five. Ask each group to discuss each of the seven possible exceptions and try to reach a consensus. Then tell each group that it will be expected to give reasons for each answer. Each group should choose one or more spokespersons.
2. The groups will need about 10 -15 minutes to arrive at their decisions. Once you have checked to make sure that each group is functioning properly, draw a grid on the board. The grid should list the case numbers along one axis and the group numbers along the other.
3. Once groups have arrived at their answers, ask for each group's response for each case, record them *in* the grid, and ask for their rationale. You may wish to add other examples (such as an electric wheelchair, skateboards, or scooters).
4. Tell your students to look back at the law: "No Vehicles in the Park." Ask how they would define the word "vehicle" in this case. Ask for volunteers to share their definitions and see if the class can come to an agreement.
5. Ask your students if they think the law does a good job of defining the term "vehicle."
6. Tell your students that now, in their small groups, they have a chance to redraft the law to make it better. They should use **Handout A: Evaluating Rules** to help them evaluate the law and how it might be rewritten. Give the groups five minutes to redraft the law so that it passes the questions in Section 1.
7. Ask each group to share their new version of the law.

D. Closing

1. Give each student a copy of **Handout C: Class Discussion Self-Assessment**. Ask your students to reflect on the group discussion. Give students five minutes to complete Handout C.
2. Ask your students the following questions:
 - Should laws be written in detail so that people can predict accurately what they mean?
 - Should they be flexible so that they can be adapted to meet changing situations?
 - Can laws they be both flexible and detailed?
 - How should "emergency situations" be provided for in the law? Who should determine what constitutes an emergency?

Evaluating Rules

Step 1: Evaluate the current rule.

- Are the rules:
 - fair?
 - easy to understand?
 - possible to follow?
 - in conflict with other rules?
 - in conflict with other important values?
 - easy to enforce?

Step 2: What changes does the rule need?

- Should the rules be
 - kept as is?
 - eliminated?
 - changed?

Why?



No Vehicles in the Park

The town of Central Heights has established a lovely park in the city. The city council wished to preserve some elements of nature, undisturbed by city noise, traffic, pollution, and crowding. It is a place where citizens can go and find grass, trees, flowers, peace, and quiet. In addition, there are play grounds and picnic areas. At all entrances to the park the following sign has been posted:



The law seems clear, but some disputes have arisen over the interpretation of the law. Interpret the law in the following cases, keeping in mind the letter of the law as well as the intent of the law.

1. John Smith lives on one side of the town and works on the other side. He will save ten minutes if he drives through the park.
2. There are many trash cans in the park where people throw away their trash, thereby keeping the park clean. The sanitation department wants to use a truck to collect the trash.
3. Two police cars are chasing a suspected bank robber. If one cuts through the park, it can get in front of the suspect's car and trap him between the patrol cars.
4. An ambulance is racing to the hospital carrying a seriously injured patient. The shortest route is through the park.
5. Some of the children who visit the park want to ride their bicycles there.
6. Mrs. Thomas wants to take her baby to the park in his stroller.
7. A monument for veterans is being created. A tank, donated by the government, is to be placed beside the monument.

Class Discussion Reflection

Evaluate your work during the class discussion by answering the following questions.

YES!	yes	no	No!
I really agree.	I agree a bit.	I disagree a bit.	I really disagree.

Circle the answer that best describes your participation in the discussion.

I stated my ideas clearly. Yes! yes no No!

I supported my ideas with facts. Yes! yes no No!

I added important questions, ideas,
and information to the discussion. Yes! yes no No!

I treated others with respect. Yes! yes no No!

I listened to what others had to say. Yes! yes no No!

During the discussion...

Something I didn't get to share was:

I learned:

A question I still have is: