

RULE OF LAW LESSON: RULE OF LAW LEARNING CIRCLES

Description

Students will work in learning circles to view and to discuss the values, principles, and ideas important to the concept of the “rule of law” as evoked by viewing “The Law Rules” video.

Standard of Learning CE.2a

The student will demonstrate knowledge of the foundation of American constitutional government by explaining the fundamental principle of the rule of law.

Objectives:

1. To engage in a shared civil discourse on the concept of the rule of law as it relates to daily life and all citizens.
2. To record the comments, reactions, issues, and questions that arise from active listening to fellow classmates.
3. To develop an agreed upon definition of the “rule of law.”
4. To demonstrate how following the rule of law leads to an orderly society and how they are responsible for preserving and protecting the “rule of law” as citizens in a free and open society.

Suggested grade levels: Civics and Economics 7th and 8th

Materials needed: “The Law Rules” video, name tents or name tags to aid the lawyer in addressing students by name, note books, markers, and newsprint

Time: One-two class periods

Procedures:

1. Arrange the room by creating two concentric circles to accommodate equal numbers of students in each circle. If your class furniture does not allow for the circle arrangement, divide the room so half the students are on one side (commentators) and the other half (observers/recorders) is on the other side.
2. The teacher acts as Facilitator for the inner circle (commentators). Your task is to act as timer and keep the students moving along with their comments on the video. You may want to provide a chart with guiding questions; however, experience suggests that students will need little assistance in discussing the video. Unless you have a very small class or a long period, you will want to limit student responses to no more than one or two minutes. Encourage all commentators to respond. A student may “pass” when his or her turn comes to speak, but everyone must comment once before this segment of the activity ends. Students may ask questions, but the Facilitator may not answer them; that is the responsibility of the observers and their Facilitator (the lawyer).
3. The visiting lawyer facilitates the outer circle. The observers/recorders in the

outer circle record the comments they have heard and try to identify key ideas, issues, concepts, and questions. They should also seek to make connections between the inner circle comments and the real world – school, family, personal experience, and current events. You should also identify three or four students to serve as “illustrators.” Give them the markers and newsprint and ask them to make graphic representations of what they have heard – cartoons, symbols, drawings, *etc.*

4. Once the outer circle (observers/recorders) has completed its presentation and shown the graphic illustrations, open the class for final summary of the activity.
5. Summary: Working as a team, the teacher and lawyer address the issues and questions within the context of the “rule of law” and its role as the foundation for our form of government, economic system, and the rights and responsibilities we all share as American citizens.
6. End the discussion by asking the following questions: (1) What does the “rule of law” mean to you? (2) How do you see yourselves as protectors of the “rule of law”?
7. Below are some key points from the video to consider as you summarize the activity:
 - We are a nation of laws ... not a nation of people.
 - Everyone is treated fairly and equally under the same set of laws.
 - The laws allow people to enjoy a peaceful existence with others.
 - Our laws are based on the Constitution and protected by the courts.
 - No one is above the law ... no one is below the law.
 - The “rule of law” is like the rules of the road ... you must follow the laws to protect the safety of all.
 - The “rule of law” is an agreement that everyone will play by the rules.
 - We are governed by rules that are in the best interest of our country ... not in the best interest of us personally.
 - In America, we follow the “rule of law.” We do not serve men or women; we serve “The Law.”

Note: As a variation of this activity, you may assign a poem, short fiction, non-fiction, or current events reading as the source of discussion. You may also vary the process for the inner circle (commentators) by having each student’s comments continue the comment of the previous student until everyone has participated. The responsibilities of the outer circle (observers/recorders) remain the same. This learning circle activity is productive method for engaging all of your students in a meaningful and enriching class.