

Title: Where can you find justice?

Theme: Organization and workings of the local court system

GLCE's:

2-C3.0.1 Give examples of how local governments make, enforce, and interpret laws (ordinances) in the local community.

Methodological procedures:

DAY 1-What is the purpose of the judicial branch and what does that look like?

Students will be able to:

State the purpose of the judicial branch of government

Give an example of a local law that might be broken and taken to the court system

Materials needed:

KWL overhead/recording sheet (Handout #1)

The Role of the Judiciary (Handout #2)

Opening Activity – Give students **Handout #1: KWL recording sheet** (see downloads) and together take a few minutes through class discussion to write down all they feel they know about the courts. (The teacher may want to simply record the K-W-L statements on a class chart or overhead or have students record class responses individually.)

Step 1 – Quickly review the branches of government and their roles. Define the judicial branch of government as the branch that interprets the laws or ordinances at the local level.

Step 2 – Give an example of the interpretation of a law using a classroom rule as an example.

-Define conflict and talk about how conflict can arise within the classroom. Write down some examples of conflict between students or between the teacher and students.

-Talk about how classroom rules were written to govern classroom behavior. Share that classroom rules are defined at a point in time but they are interpreted and applied on a case by case basis. Give an example such as:

Most classrooms have a rule about not talking while the teacher is talking. If a student talks to someone while the teacher is talking they are breaking the rule. But what if the student is saying, “Bless you”, after someone has sneezed? What if a student has retrieved another’s pencil from the floor and the student said, “Thank you”? What if a student is mumbling to himself/herself? The teacher must interpret the rule to decide if it

applies to each situation and how it applies. This is what the judiciary does. They take the rules of the state and the community and interpret them to see if the rule applies and how it applies to each situation.

Assessment strategies:

Have students complete **Handout #2: The Role of the Judiciary**. Students will need to fill in the blank as to the purpose of the judiciary. They will also illustrate an example of a local law or ordinance that might be broken in the local community in which a judge may have to make a decision.

Available downloads:

KWL overhead (Handout #1)

Assessment Activity (Handout #2)

DAY 2 – Where are civil and criminal cases heard?

Students will be able to:

Understand the basic differences between a civil and criminal court case

Materials needed:

Civil and Criminal Court Case Definitions and Examples Resource (Handout #3)

Scenarios Cards (Handout #4)

Methodological procedures:

Opening Activity – Review K-W-L responses from day 1. Students may add information as it is discussed. Answer any questions on the KWL.

Step 1 – State lesson purpose—to understand the two types of cases that are heard in the local court system. Explain that the day’s lesson centers around two types of court cases: **civil and criminal**. Using the **Civil and Criminal Court Case Definitions and Examples Resource** (Handout #3), inform students of the two types of cases that judges often hear: civil and criminal. Discuss some of the examples provided on the handout and what classifies each as a civil or criminal type of case.

Step 2 – Talk through some examples of both types of cases using the **Scenarios Cards** (Handout #4) making sure that students understand the basic differences between the two types of cases.

Assessment suggestion: A few of the scenarios could be saved and used as a check for student understanding.

Available downloads:

Civil and Criminal Court Case Definitions and Examples Resource (Handout #3)

Scenarios Cards (Handout #4)

Suggested web sites:

www.courts.michigan.gov

DAY 3 – What happens in a courtroom?

Students will be able to:

List courtroom terms and define them as well as understand

Materials needed:

Courtroom Diagram (Handout #5)

Courtroom Layout & Court Definitions Document (Handout #6)

The Courtroom Diagram: A Check for Understanding (Handout #7)

Opening Activity –

Have students refer to the K-W-L chart and answer any questions that students may have from the day 2.

Step 1 – Use this link to view a 4 minute video summarizing the information learned in the last few days. http://courts.michigan.gov/plc/videos/MI_court_system.htm.

Step 2 – Each student will need the **Courtroom Diagram** (Handout #5) and copies of the **Court Definitions Document** (Handout #6). Students can work to place the courtroom personnel in to the correct places on their diagrams using the information provided in both handouts. (This activity could be completed individually, in pairs, or in small groups.) *Note for the students that the personnel for a civil case is different from that in a criminal case.

Step 3 - Using input from the groups complete the diagram on the overhead.

Step 4 - To give students further practice with these legal terms you could play a Jeopardy type game. First, collect the definition papers. Put students into pairs or groups if you would like. You could read a definition aloud and have students answer on paper which legal term goes with the definition. Students would answer in the format: who is _____ or what is _____. The courtroom diagram could be used for reference.

Assessment strategies:

On the back of the courtroom diagram have students choose two legal terms they learned today and in their own words define them.

Also, **The Courtroom Diagram: A Check for Understanding** (Handout #7) could be used to check student understanding of how a courtroom operates.

Author's notes:

The purpose of this lesson is to familiarize students with courtroom terminology. In doing so they will gain an introductory understanding of the places, people, and things involved in court proceeding. The definitions are not meant for memorization and testing.

Available downloads:

Courtroom Diagram (Handout #5)

Courtroom Layout & Court Definitions Document (Handout #6)

The Courtroom Diagram: A Check for Understanding (Handout #7)

Suggested web sites:

www.factmonster.com

http://courts.michigan.gov/plc/videos/MI_court_system.html

DAY 4 – Where is your local court and how can people resolve conflict?

Students will be able to:

- Identify different ways of solving problems
- Recognize that the court system is one way of resolving conflict

Materials needed:

Where is Your Local Court? (Handout #8)

Step 1 - View information about your local court from previous days lessons.

The district court is the most local court. Online information may be viewed at the website listed below or hard copies can be printed for students. There will be a picture of the local judge and a bio. Note that this would be their local court and most conflicts that occur in their community are handled here. Students can fill in the information in the corresponding

Step 2 – Discuss methods of resolving conflict.

Ask the students: Do you ever have problems? What kinds of problems do you have? Elicit several responses.

Ask the students: How do you solve your problems? Elicit several responses.

Ask the students if grown ups solve problems differently than they solve problems. Share with students the following comments.

Our country declared its independence from England over 200 years ago. At that time we said every person had a free and equal opportunity to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. Sometimes one person's pursuit of happiness interferes with that of another person. To help with the conflicts this interference can cause, the citizens of this country agreed to certain guidelines for their behavior. These guidelines are what make up our system of laws.

The reasons for conflicts between persons vary. One person might not know or understand the law. Another person might choose to break a law on purpose. Laws do not cover every possible situation. Sometimes one person comes into conflict with another individual. Sometimes the conflict is between an individual and the government. At other times a person may offend the common good of the people.

These disputes need to be settled in a way that fits the democratic principles of our society. Often courts help settle these types of disputes.

Assessment Strategies: Students could role play a courtroom simulation in the classroom setting. Different roles could be assigned and the classroom could be rearranged to match that of a courtroom. A scenario from the scenario cards could be used as the subject matter for the case. A debrief session could include asking students questions to see if they can apply the previously learned information to this case.

Available downloads:

Where is Your Local Court? (Handout #8)

Suggested web sites:

DAY 5 – Closing Activity

Activity:

Here are several choices for a final activity:

1. The Michigan court system website has a great online game that tests students' knowledge of the Michigan court system. It would be a great way for students to use and review the knowledge they've gained in this unit. Students who finish early can play a bonus online game.
<http://courts.michigan.gov/plc/KidJustice/index.htm>
2. Visit a local court room.
The judge with whom we spoke recommended that students not visit an actual courtroom proceeding at this age. He said that the nature of the crimes, the inability to predict conduct and language outbursts, and the general tediousness of the proceeding makes a visit inappropriate or boring for students. An option might be to visit the courtroom when it is empty. An appointment could be made with the judge to listen to him/her explain the court system and to ask questions. The judge we interviewed also mentioned that students aren't normally prepared to ask him pertinent questions. It would be a good idea to have students review their learning logs and write questions before meeting with the judge. This trip could be combined with visits to the executive and legislative branches of your local government.
3. Invite a court official into the classroom.

Officials to invite could include: judge, courtroom clerk, police officer, attorney, local prosecutor. Have the students use their learning logs to brainstorm and write out pertinent questions. Conclude the visit with discussion or reflective writing.

4. Review a case of local interest.
Records of local court cases can be found at your local clerk's office.

Available downloads:

Suggested web sites:

<http://courts.michigan.gov/plc/KidJustice/index.htm>