

On Teaching Children the Rules and the Law

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Justice is the product of orderly human action controlled by a set of rules.

- Frederick Graves

INTRODUCTION

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness . . .” (*The Declaration of Independence*). This statement constitutes the backbone of the American nation. It was upon this premise that our nation’s forefathers started the task of building our society. It was the seed from which our system of government and the conceptualization of our citizenship germinated. Thus, ample knowledge of the way we have structured our system of government is an essential condition of quality citizenship, as is a clear notion of the way its branches intertwine. Furthermore, the development of quality citizenship must begin in the initial stages of childhood if we are to expect our youth to evolve into fully mature citizens. The focus of this unit will be a pragmatic approach intended to promote an understanding among my fifth graders of why rules and regulations are necessary in all realms of civilized living, and why it is important to abide by them. The unit will also center on how the judicial branch of the government is structured as well as how it functions on both the federal and the state level.

A logical beginning for the development of this curriculum unit is an insight into the antecedents of the American judicial system. The contents tie in with the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation as a new plan for national government, and the revision of these articles by the Constitutional Convention, which led to the development of the Constitution and the creation of the three branches of power, including the system of checks and balances.

In order to achieve the understanding of the law that a true citizen needs, the topic of this curriculum unit also revolves around aspects pertaining to school conduct. This is another starting point used in this unit with the purpose of creating awareness of the reasons that rules and regulations are necessary, and of the importance of abiding by them. Accomplishing this can build the foundation for further enlightenment in issues regarding the law.

Consequently, we will study the most relevant aspects of HISD’s *The Code of Student Conduct*, including descriptions of the behaviors considered student misconduct, as well as a review of how these behaviors disrupt the educational process. We will also discuss aspects pertaining to when and where the rules of the *Code* apply, and the general

discipline guidelines teachers and administrators adhere to when assessing penalties. The students will learn the five levels into which offenses are categorized, depending on their seriousness; review the general procedures used for resolving school problems; and cover specific examples of misconduct and disciplinary options.

Another fundamental issue that I cover within this unit is that of peaceful conflict resolution. I believe that effective conflict management is a basic resource in our interaction with fellow citizens. It can surely mean the difference between peaceful coexistence and a life plagued with constant conflict that will lead to frequent interventions of the law enforcement agencies and the judicial system as mediators and conflict solvers. We will discuss issues related to the importance of coming to grips with the fact that there may often be disagreement among people regarding their ideas, but that understanding the nature of conflict means learning to solve problems through compromise, discussion, adult support, or ignoring someone who is creating a conflict provoking situation. In short, by practicing strategies to deal with conflict resolution, my students will learn to solve problems by peaceful means.

In an essential aspect of the unit, the students will put on fictional judicial cases so that they will become familiar with the major features of the judicial system. At the same time, they will gain some valuable insight into the implications that transgressing the law may have in the lives of individuals.

I will use literature, news stories, mock trials, role-plays, videos, and websites in order to expose the students to the process of how civil and criminal cases evolve from their onset to the presentation of a case. I will take them through all of the phases of a judicial case until it comes to a culmination at the sentencing phase. I will also include an overview of the appeal and the post-conviction processes, the serving of the sentence, and the correctional system.

WHY WHAT STUDENTS WILL LEARN IS IMPORTANT

Information about the Specific Topic – Why That’s Important

In my application essay for admission to the seminar “How American Courts Work, From Top to Bottom,” I stated that as a recent immigrant to this country, there are two main intrinsic motivational forces that compelled me to familiarize myself with the way that the American system of justice operates. I intended to gain a broad insight into the American judicial system that would serve a twofold purpose. First, I sought personal cultivation as I became more knowledgeable in aspects concerning the way that the American judicial system is structured. As head of a household, as well as a new resident of this country, it is imperative that I learn the intricacies of the judicial branch of the government so that I may serve the American society more effectively. Second, I sought a source of professional development in order to expand my knowledge in this area, which would also enable me in turn to pass this newly acquired information to my students.

As a fifth grade social studies teacher, I am deeply conscious of the need to develop awareness among my students of how the American system of justice operates. It is a fact that the only exposure that the average citizen in any society receives of the judicial system is from fictionalized media. With this in mind, I feel it is my duty as an educator to help build in today's children the foundations that will contribute to their development as citizens who are capable of functioning efficiently in society. I believe the knowledge of the judicial system can empower my students with the attitude and working knowledge they need to accomplish this goal.

In view of all the considerations stated above, I fully understand my key role as an educator in developing awareness among my students of how the American justice system operates. Especially considering the fact that I teach at an inner city elementary school. Children of Hispanic origin, whether born in the United States, in Mexico, or in Central America, make up approximately 95 percent of the school population. Due to various factors such as socio-economic strata, lack of mastery of the English language, low academic achievement, and the like, the 20 children that I teach are considered "at-risk." What this labeling implies is that these children have a high likelihood of falling through the cracks and end up becoming a burden to society.

With this in mind, added to the unquestionable fact that the only exposure that the average citizen receives of the judicial system is from fictionalized media, I have conceived the development of a curriculum unit around the theme "Teaching Children the Rules and the Law." It is vital that the above-profiled students develop their consciousness concerning their abiding by the laws of the nation, so that they may eventually become the kind of citizens, every society needs and wants – namely, citizens who will contribute their grain of sand in the task of helping human kind to move forward.

All of this takes on special importance on a personal and a professional level, in view of the fact that the judiciary system of American society is unlike that of many foreign nations, including my own. The participation of a group of citizens in deciding whether there is sufficient evidence to hold a trial or to convict a person of a crime is a remarkable characteristic of the American judicial system not found in many cultures. This is definitely an essential element of living in a free society. It is certainly advantageous to an individual to have a group of his or her peers come to a consensus regarding issues related to such rights as important as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

In the task of delivering the concepts previously reviewed to my students, I intend to explore the stages of the judicial process with them by examining the stages of a criminal case starting with the offense that brought about its onset, all the way to its conclusion. Furthermore, and since it seems that civic education has traditionally been neglected in our educational system, it is imperative that we strive to change this attitude. At the same time, it is essential that we start working on developing character traits of good citizenship among the young generations, in order to infuse in our students the respect

that the law warrants. Besides, the younger generations need to learn about how the creators of the American Constitution structured the system of government of this nation around three branches. Therefore, this unit also focuses on the three branches of government so that they will learn that the legislative makes the laws, the executive enforces the law, and the judicial interprets the law. They will reflect upon the reasons for which the men who wrote the Constitution thought this separation of powers would be beneficial.

The classroom is an excellent place to start the process of learning about the government and of instilling in children the respect for the law. One of the tools that we can use in order to start this task is *The Code of Student Conduct*. This document serves as the foundation for HISD's core value, "Safety Above All Else." This premise guides everything the district stands for. In essence, a set of guidelines seeks to provide students and teachers with a safe environment that is conducive to learning.

After some reflection in this respect, I came to the realization that we seldom are able to take the time to go over this compendium of rules with the students. As far as the above-mentioned booklet is concerned, other pressing or urgent issues in general so often overwhelm teachers and administrators that too frequently, and in spite of their good intentions, they are not able to pursue the goal of getting their students to familiarize themselves with the *Code*. Despite their best intentions, their efforts do not go beyond sending a copy home with the students and getting a signed commitment back from the parents or legal guardians.

Consequently, most likely, in many cases, families do not take the time to discuss its contents in the household; in fact, they probably just put away or even dispose of it along with the trash. The parents and guardians too often fail to realize that, by affixing their signature, they are committing themselves to a binding contract that demands their cooperation in accomplishing a positive school climate. Nonetheless, teachers and administrators readily apply the stipulations contained in the book by "throwing the book at them" whenever students violate any of the rules of behavior that it contemplates.

The usefulness of HISD's *Code of Conduct* revolves around a fact that Dr. Kaye Stripling mentions in the foreword to the *Code*: "The purpose of this Code of Student Conduct is to inform all students and parents of the Houston Independent School District's expectations regarding behavior and conduct" (*The Code of Student Conduct*). This statement has led me to ponder upon whether we really are informing the students and parents of what the district's expectations are, and what we could do in order to achieve this purpose to a higher degree.

Furthermore, Dr. Stripling states:

Students and parents are expected to become familiar with the provisions of the district wide *Code of Student Conduct* and the rules and regulations adopted and implemented by their individual schools based upon their

School-Based Discipline Management System. Students are also expected to abide by the policies set forth in the *Code* so that they can truly get the most out of their years in school (*The Code of Student Conduct* 1).

Therefore, it is our responsibility as educators to take on the task of promoting familiarization with the *Code* equally among parents and students. By planting this seed, we will be taking some proactive measures that may very likely reap positive future results and thus diminish the necessity for the application of the *Code*, not to mention the positive repercussions related to the maximization of instructional time.

In addition, the rules and disciplinary options in the *Code* link closely to the world outside our schools; therefore, students would not only get the most out of their school years, as Dr Stripling puts it, but also develop lifelong behavior patterns of compliance with the law. All of this takes on special significance when we consider the fact that continual observance of the rules that society has established makes it possible for people to coexist peacefully as well as fulfill personal goals linked to the benefit of society.

Academic Skills That Will Be Learned and Their Importance

Along with the personal cultivation derived from the acquisition of the concepts taught in this unit, the students will also develop their academic knowledge of the branches of the government. They will acquire a broader view of the ways they operate, their interrelations and their boundaries; as well as expand their specialized vocabulary related to this topic. This unit will also help my students to develop a series of academic skills such as writing, insofar as they will need to produce an array of written documents pertaining to the case examined in the class.

In addition, I will expose my language challenged students to a substantial amount of oral practice as we conduct follow-up discussions on the various aspects involved in the role-plays and mock trials that will be acted out in class. These activities will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the development of their verbal ability. They will also hone in on their organizational skills as they put together the different parts of their assignments. Along with this, they will develop reading skills such as sequencing, summarizing, making predictions, drawing conclusions, making generalizations, and identifying main ideas. They will benefit from exposure to a wide scope of literary genres as well.

Furthermore, throughout the development of the unit, I intend to correlate the contents to other Project Clear curriculum objectives in social studies, (from the initial stages of the development of the American nation all the way through modern day America). We will also deal with objectives in language arts (specialized vocabulary; spelling; and writing, including organization, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions,

mechanics), while I provide my students with the resources and tools that will facilitate the task of becoming familiar with the process of justice.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES – HOW THIS WILL BE DONE IN THE CLASSROOM

Activities

The topic of this curriculum unit lends itself to developing an ample variety of activities in the task of accomplishing its objectives. I have planned assignments such as readings, discussions, role-plays, mock trials, handouts, and Internet-based tasks. I have designed these activities to help my students to make the connection between following school rules and abiding by the law in the outside world. The following is an elaborate description of how these activities will develop.

Order of Activities

In one of the preliminary lessons, I intend to draw my students into it by providing them with some background that will give them a broad notion as to where the American judicial system stems from. I will dig into their prior knowledge related to the early development of the nation. While doing this, I plan to tie it in with the *Declaration of Independence* and the Bill of Rights, so that eventually we will be led to the principle that rights imply responsibilities, and that respecting people's rights is inherent to living in society.

We will then continue to examine the three branches of government. I will explain to the students that the writers of the Constitution created a government with three separate branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. We will then examine the Constitution and point out the articles that are relevant to each branch. In order to introduce student to specialized vocabulary related to government and to explore their prior knowledge, I will then supply the students with a handout that contains government terms (*Project Clear Model Lessons*). They will categorize the terms according to the branch to which they pertain. The students will also find newspaper or magazine articles that relate to each branch of the government and share with the class how they relate.

The previous activities will lead us to the conclusion that the judicial branch is the regulating entity in the coexistence with our fellow citizens. As Frederick Graves puts it, "Justice is the product of orderly human action controlled by a set of rules" (Graves). From there, we will proceed to the study of how the judicial system is structured and how it operates.

Another pivotal point of the development of this curricular unit will consist of getting my students to understand the principles of the United States Constitution as the written plan of the government, and especially the Bill of Rights. In doing this, I intend to get my

students to gain a clear understanding of the purpose for the creation of the Bill of Rights, and the importance of guaranteeing individual rights in any society. They will also gain some insight into the rights guaranteed by each one of the amendments, as well as the responsibilities that accompany these rights. We will explore the due process of law and the right to a trial by jury as well.

In order to pursue the objectives described in the previous paragraph, I will have the students examine several pictures from newspapers or magazines so that they may infer what specific right is being illustrated. I will also bring pictures depicting the wrong way that these rights may be exercised, and I will have them respond to these illustrations. At this point, I will stress the fact that American citizens enjoy many rights that are guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. For comparison and analysis, I will also assign them with the task of finding news articles that describe what it is like in other countries when citizens attempt to exercise the rights that American citizens take for granted. In working with the specific news story, the students will complete a *Clear Model Lessons* chart in which they will provide information such as the story headline; what happened; when and where it happened; who was involved; details of the story; and how it is related to the Bill of Rights. This will help to build a solid understanding of the Bill of Rights as a fundamental safeguard that prevents the government from abusing its power against citizens (*Project Clear Model Lessons*).

To continue to focus my students on becoming aware of their individual rights, we will read and discuss together the amendments and their meanings as we list the rights protected by each. We will then proceed to discuss the responsibilities that are closely tied in with each of these rights as we illustrate with examples from the history of the country (e.g. the March on Washington). Students will create graphic organizers in which they can show how to exercise their individual rights responsibly. They will also draw charts containing rights and responsibilities that they will later use to share with the rest of the class, explaining their reasoning. Another assignment for this lesson will consist of choosing six of the rights protected by the Bill of Rights and creating a foldable book that illustrates the selected rights and the responsibilities that are linked with them (*Project Clear Model Lessons*). The students will be required to rephrase the amendments, provide some type of artwork associated with the right. They will also include an illustration of the responsibilities associated with the right, and finally state in their own words how they intend to exercise this right in their lives as well as the responsibilities that go with it. I will place emphasis on salient aspects such as the due process of law, which we will define as “things the government must do before a person can be deprived of freedom or property” (*Clear Model Lessons*).

Following this examination of the Bill of Rights, I will proceed to introduce my students to the American System of Justice by presenting it in a situational and practical fashion. Following the previously described activities, I intend to lead my students into a discussion regarding our classroom set of rules. The class as a whole developed these rules as a preventive student-centered discipline plan, which is part of the Consistency

Management and Cooperative Discipline being implemented in the Houston Independent School District.

Since the class as a whole created this set of rules, consequences, and rewards through a collaborative effort, I will dwell upon how abiding by them makes it possible for us to go about our daily classroom routine smoothly. In addition, I will lead them into some reflection regarding the fact that these rules constitute a binding agreement and demand our permanent commitment to them. We will also examine the consequences we face when we opt not to obey them. We will then conclude that this is a typical example of harmonic coexistence in a democratic society.

From the above discussion, I will move on to an analysis of *The Code of Student Conduct*. From this analysis, I will direct my students into making an analogy between the HISD student code of conduct as the book that stipulates our rules of conduct in school, the school authority figures, and the way the codes of justice apply to life out in the real world. We will read the relevant articles from *The Code of Student Conduct*, discuss examples of proper and improper behavior in school, and review the rewards for good conduct and the consequences of misconduct. We will decide on a definition of discipline, and a discussion will ensue regarding the importance of following rules both in school and in everyday life outside the school. Thus, I will use the code of conduct as a stepping-stone in order to take it to a larger scale by establishing a connection with life outside the school. As an example, I could ask the students what they think would be the consequences of vandalizing or stealing other people's property outside the school or carrying a gun in a public place for instance.

I will begin the analysis of the *Code of Conduct* by discussing the student rights, responsibilities, and board policies. I will emphasize the fact that the principle stated in the code: "[T]he proper balance of student rights and privileges with student responsibilities and obligations is essential to the orderly conduct of the district's educational mission" (*Code of Conduct* 4). Therefore, the appropriate implementation of these policies should have a favorable impact in achieving a positive learning environment at school and at school related activities. This will lead to exploring the acts of misconduct categorized in the *Code*.

We will proceed to focus on the five levels of offenses and give examples of each one of them. Level I infractions include the violation of classroom rules such as the following:

- Treat others the way you would like to be treated.
- Pay attention when the teacher is talking
- Keep your hands, feet, and objects to yourself

The teacher most frequently deals with violations to these types of rules personally. Typically, he or she will point out the rule in question and the consequence that goes with

it. Initially the teacher will issue a verbal warning. If the student repeats the offense, the teacher may hold a conference with the student or send a note home to the parents to be returned signed the next day. This stresses the need for parental support in the pursuit of a positive school climate. If the previous measures fail to produce the expected positive results, the student will be sent to the principal's office for a conference.

The Level II offenses are either continuance of a Level I, or an infraction that is more serious in nature. These generally result in a referral to an administrator. The graveness of the violation and any previous history of occurrences will determine the disciplinary response. Typical violations among these according to the *Code of Conduct* include:

- Leaving the classroom or school grounds without permission
- Any form of verbal abuse or bullying
- Cafeteria disturbance
- Failure to abide by the rules and regulations during extracurricular activities
- Violation of the school's mandatory uniform policy
- Disruptive behavior on the school bus

The Level III offenses encompass acts of conduct for which the offender may be suspended or, if the offense is serious or persistent enough, the student may be referred to a disciplinary alternative program. Some of the infractions in this category at this age level might include:

- Fighting
- Stealing
- More than one instance of cutting class or other forms of truancy
- Possession of a knife
- Failure to comply with reasonable requests of school personnel and/or defiance of the authority of school personnel
- Indecent/unsolicited sexual proposal or sexual harassment
- Profanity, vulgar language, or obscene gestures
- Possession of laser pointers or pens

Disciplinary actions for The Level IV types of offenses require the removal of the student from the classroom and his/her placement in or referral to a disciplinary alternative education program at least temporarily. Level IV infractions are extremely serious and include such behavior as felony conduct (*Code of Conduct* 8). The acts of misconduct of this level may include:

- Engaging in assault
- Dealing in controlled substances
- Engaging in the use of incendiary materials
- Burglarizing an HISD facility

- Violation of computer security to alter school records

After this discussion, I will illustrate the general procedures for the resolution of school problems, including the disciplinary options. I intend to accomplish this using role-plays. The students will act out situations that depict typical offenses of the various levels. Some students will be assigned the roles of teacher and administrators and will be in charge of deciding what the disciplinary options should be in each case. We will also examine the Zero Tolerance Policy, developed in response to the priority of keeping our schools safe. We will define the policy as follows, “All students who unlawfully possess a firearm, illegal knife as defined by state law, explosive, or any other dangerous object or weapon on school district property, on school buses, and/or in attendance at district-related activities shall be recommended for expulsion” (*Code of Conduct* 13).

We will discuss the strict application of this policy as required by the Board of Education. Besides, I will stress those situations in which the school authorities are under the obligation to report an offense to the HISD police department and the local law police department. I will prompt the students to give examples of cases they may have witnessed in which this policy has been applied. In addition, we will mention instances in which there have been abuses in its application. The main goal will be to create awareness among the students as to what types of actions may cause a teacher or administrator to take this harsh type of disciplinary action.

Following the activities described previously, I will review the student complaint policy, including its purpose, the types of complaints and the specific policies that they address, as well as the presentation procedures outlined in the *Code*. I will finalize this aspect of the unit by referring to the student and parent acknowledgement and stressing the fact that it is vital that both students and parents familiarize themselves with the *Code* and cooperate in fostering and maintaining a positive school climate.

In addition to the above, I intend to incorporate the material from the seminar by exploring examples of how our daily actions may have legal implications that are likely to affect our lives. I will accomplish this through a series of role-plays and mock trials in which the students act out the roles of various individuals involved in a fictional civil case as well as a criminal case. To this end, the class will read several pieces of literature, including *Miss Louisa and the Outlaws*, *Under the Lemon Moon*, and *When the Bear Stole the Chinook*. I found these stories suitable for my objectives since at least one the characters in them does something that could be considered a violation of the law or an infringement on other people’s rights. Other criteria I used to determine the suitability of the readings related to aspects as the level and background of my students. The readings are challenging and interesting enough without being beyond the students’ zone of proximal development. After reading each story, a group discussion will ensue in which I will stress the relevant aspects of the different situations. I will place emphasis on the consequences of transgressing the boundaries of the law so that my students will be

empowered with the knowledge of the law that will help them develop the necessary respect for it.

In order to achieve the objectives of the unit to the fullest, I will schedule a presentation by a guest speaker. I will ask the law enforcement officer who conducts the DARE program to give my students a talk concerning his duties as a law enforcer. This program, sponsored by the Houston Police Department, seeks to create drug awareness and resistance education among the youth of Houston. I intend for the officer to draw from his personal experiences to describe to the class the ways in which an arrest is properly conducted, the reading of the Miranda rights, the collection of evidence, the completion of the pertinent documentation, etc.

Along with the activities described above, I will lead a discussion on the nature of conflict: conflict as a disagreement of ideas or interests; conflict as an infringement on other people's rights; how to manage conflict; and what it means to solve conflicts in an agreeable manner instead of resorting to violence. I will have them role-play conflict situations, and we will work cooperatively in discussing the ways in which they might best manage the various situations. This will be a good way to foster higher order critical thinking skills. From here, we will proceed to work with situations of a conflictive nature so that the students may apply the conflict management strategies discussed previously. Then I will show the students a video titled *Bullying* from the Conflict Resolution Series. In this video, a student faces bullying on the bus by other children. After we watch, we will discuss the situation that develops and prepare the reenactment of the events in the classroom. In the second part, an older group steals a ball from a group of kids playing basketball after school and then starts posing threats to them. We will watch the video, discuss the contents, and proceed to recreate the events in class. We will wrap up the activity by going over the conflict management strategies discussed at the beginning of the lesson (*Bullying*).

Another activity that I will assign my students is an analysis of how a judicial case evolves from the moment that certain events occur that lead to its arising, through the trial and the outcome. In order to achieve this specific objective, I will resort to a web-based assignment. *The Little Red Schoolhouse* website features a social studies section in which the students can click on the "Government and Law" link. This in turn will take them to the link, "Criminal Law Procedures," where they will be able to interact with a criminal procedure flow chart. Initially, the students explore an incident that has the characteristics of a law infringement event. They will then need to select one of two options as to what consequences this may lead to. In this manner, they will proceed through the criminal law procedure starting with the offense, followed by the arrest and the police report. From there they will proceed to analyze the prosecutor's review of the case and conclude that at this stage, the case may be dismissed due to lack of evidence, or that the prosecutor may decide to file formal charges. Then, if the latter is the case, they will move forward to the arraignment phase, where they will learn about the due process, pleading, and plea negotiation stages. At this point in the assignment, the students will

understand that if the accused pleads guilty, the judge will proceed to sentencing. Otherwise, the case will go to trial; the students will then learn about jury selection. At the conclusion of the activity, they will analyze the final stages of the criminal procedure, namely the verdict and the punishment (*The Little Red Schoolhouse*).

From the *Little Red Schoolhouse* website, we will also use a link titled “KidsCourt,” which contains an overview of how courts work and which will provide them with information that they can use when performing mock trials (*The Little Red Schoolhouse*).

Another resource that I will have my students use is the website, *Lawforkids.org*. They will go to the link titled “Stories” and read and listen to actual accounts of youngsters who have broken the law in various ways and who are currently serving time in juvenile detention. They will also be able to read comments posted by others as well as react to the stories by posting their own comments on the website.

Following this activity, my students will go to the link, “Justice for All” on the same website and take a virtual tour of a juvenile detention facility. The students are able to select among a list of various actual detainees and listen to their stories as they proceed on the tour. After the tour, they will read comments posted by other visitors, as well as write their own comments and submit them. Afterwards, the students will write a letter to the tour guide expressing their impressions about life in detention (*Lawforkids.org*). Following this exposure to the previous real life accounts, the students will go to another link titled “Toons.” From there they will select from a list of role-play situations to act out. These deal with such issues as driving under the influence, shoplifting, joyriding, school threats, child labor laws, etc. After the performances, there will be a follow-up discussion and additional reading on this webpage for further information regarding the legal implications of the offenses under discussion.

To further utilize the *Lawforkids.org* website, the students will go to the games link and play a game titled “A Day in the Life of Tommy.” They will take on the role of Tommy, a boy who finds himself in some tough situations in his daily routine. In dealing with them, Tommy will need to decide whether he breaks the law or not. The students will try to select the appropriate choices that will keep Tommy out of trouble and finish the game. Upon successfully finishing the activity, the students will be able to print a certificate of completion.

From this website, I will also use a series of quizzes to assess my students’ knowledge of the concepts taught. They will go to the “Law Quiz” link and take the following quizzes: #780 – Branches of the Government; #776 – Citizens and the Government; and #3668 – The Bill of Rights and You (*Lawforkids.org*).

Students will be required to complete other assignments throughout the unit. They will read *The Code of Student Conduct*, specifically the sections regarding student rights and responsibilities, the levels of student misconduct, and disciplinary options. Some

students will then act out typical situations of misconduct and others will take the roles of the schools' authority figures, who will then apply the code of conduct accordingly.

In the accomplishment of the objectives of this unit, the students will also read several pieces of fictional literature, which will serve as the basis for setting up one or more of the characters for mock trials. One of these pieces is a play titled *Miss Louisa and the Outlaws*. The story describes the events that take place when two outlaws trying to make their getaway break into a school and take refuge in a classroom. The teacher manages to tip off the sheriff, who promptly arrests the two thieves (Watts). The students will then prepare the mock trial. I will assign the parts and the students will prepare a script that includes the various characters who take part in a trial.

In order to prepare their mock trials, I will provide the students with guidelines so that they will familiarize themselves with the trial process. They will get a handout from the Minnesota Center for Community Legal Education of the University of Minnesota website (*Civically Speaking*). The handout will take them through the mock trial procedure starting with listing the participants as follows:

- Judge
- Prosecution Attorney
- Defense attorney
- Jury
- Representatives of the media (sketch artists, reporters)
- Bailiff
- Witnesses for the prosecution
- Witnesses for the defense

From here, they will proceed to the details of the standard routine for the opening of the trial. The opening statement follows this. The prosecution attorney will introduce himself/herself, state what he or she hopes to prove, and present the facts on his or her side. The defense attorney will follow suit and explain the evidence on his or her side after introducing himself or herself. Next, the handout tells about the oath as a reminder that everyone must tell the truth. Then the bailiff will swear all witnesses in, and the prosecution will proceed to the direct examination of the witnesses. The students will read examples of questions that will help the witnesses tell the complete story, such as: How do you know the defendant? What do you know about the case? What happened? What do you remember? What happened afterwards? Then we will move on to the cross examination in which the defense attorney will interrogate witnesses in an attempt to prove that the witness is lying or is not able to remember the events distinctly. Finally, I will discuss the closing argument with the students so that they will understand that at this stage, each side summarizes the testimony previously presented in such a way as to try to convince the jury to believe his or her side of the case (*Civically Speaking*).

We will then read a short story titled *Under the Lemon Moon*. This fictional piece explores the nature of human actions and narrates the events that occur when a hoodlum trespasses onto the property of the family of a ten-year old girl one night and takes the lemons from her tree. The next morning, the girl goes out to the market and finds the man selling her lemons at the market (Fine). The class will put on a role-play of the situation in which a student playing the part of the sheriff arrests the offender. The sheriff will complete the legal paperwork, and other students will then put him on trial for the crime. In doing this, the class will follow the process involved in a criminal case. Other roles will be as follows: The trespasser and lemon thief is the defendant, the girl's father is the plaintiff on behalf of his daughter, 12 students will be the jurors, one student will be the judge, and another will play the part of the bailiff.

Another reading that will be included is *Shh! We're Writing the Constitution*. This highly engaging narrative describes the events of the summit of the 55 delegates from the 13 states. It also recreates the conditions under which they worked their way through the intricacies of drawing up the plan of government that gave birth to the American Constitution, which today constitutes the backbone of the democratic system of government of the nation. The class will hold a discussion regarding the fact that there were still issues that needed to be ironed out, namely that they had not made clear provisions for the safeguard of individual rights (Fritz 33). This raised a concern among the delegates that required the later Bill of Rights. At this point in the reading, the students will take on the roles of the various delegates of the convention and act out a role-play in which they will represent how they imagine this situation developed. In order to help the students to understand how the delegates realized the necessity to incorporate a careful balance of powers, I will conduct the following activity: I will select three students and I will give one a slip of paper which says "Playground Equipment," another a slip that says "Key to the Playground," and the last a slip which says "Permission." These students will represent the rest of the class. One third will have all the equipment, another third will have the key to the playground, and the other third will have a permission slip that allows for the use of the playground. Then I will ask which group has the most power. Students will discuss and share responses. Then I will ask what they would have to do if all of them wanted to go out to play. This will illustrate the point that there needs to be cooperation among the branches of government in order for the government to accomplish its mission (*Clear Model Lessons*). Using this scenario, I will talk about how the writers of the Constitution wished to insure that no particular branch would become stronger than the others would. I will present an example of how the power of the president is kept in check by Congress.

Materials to Be Used

In order to accomplish the objectives of this curriculum unit, I have incorporated the following materials:

- Fiction and non-fiction Literature (*Under the Lemon Moon, Miss Louisa and the Outlaws, and Shh! We're Writing the Constitution*)
- Social studies textbook (From this book we will get information on the branches of government and the balance of powers).
- Social studies model lessons, HISD Project CLEAR Curriculum
- Videos (*Peer Conflict and Bullying*)
- Internet sources *Lawforkids.org, Little Red Schoolhouse, and Civically Speaking*
- *The Code of Student Conduct*
- Word wall (legal terms)
- Worksheets (questionnaire on rules)
- Handouts (mock trial procedure)

Other Aspects of the Implementation Strategy

The class will also watch a series of videos with contents related to the topic of the unit. One of them, titled *Bullying*, is a part of the Conflict Resolution Series. It portrays the predicament of an overweight student as he faces daily harassment by other children on the bus. In the second part, an older group steals the ball of a group of kids playing basketball after school and subjects them to threats (*Conflict Resolution for Students: Bullying*).

We will watch another video clip titled *Peer Conflict*, also part of the Conflict Resolution Series. In this particular one, students look at ways to deal with each other when conflicts arise. Excited friends push students into a fight showing peer pressure and its ability to incite violence. In another section, gossip leads to rumors that jeopardize a friendship, providing a good lesson in interpersonal communication (*Conflict Resolution for Students: Peer Conflict*).

A video titled *Peer Pressure*, from the Schlessinger Teen Health Video Series presents conversations with youngsters who have found themselves victims of peer pressure. In this one, educators present ways for youths to reinforce their individuality, to recognize peer pressure in their lives, to understand the full scope of its destructiveness and to resist the negative influences of others (*Teen Health Video Series: Peer Pressure*).

The students will do other assignments as well, such as additional readings (books, newspaper clippings, magazines), role-plays, dramatizations, vocabulary exercises (fill-in the blanks, multiple choice, sentence completion, word puzzles, etc.), Internet-based research projects, and writing reports; they will also be expected to create a portfolio. In addition, a group of students will be in charge of creating a vocabulary word wall that includes the specialized terms learned throughout the unit. I will finalize the unit by assigning a web research project about careers in law and law enforcement.

I will evaluate my students using various assessment tools. They will take interactive quizzes on the web and written tests. They will use rubrics to evaluate their cooperative

work as well. I will also present them with situations for the analysis of good and bad choices and will assess their decision making process. I will grade the various writing assignments, multiple choice and completion exercises, and word puzzles. The portfolio that they will create will also have a considerable weight when the time comes for a final grade on the unit.

My expectation at the close of this curriculum unit is to have created awareness among my students of the importance of the judicial system as a way to maintain cohesion and a peaceful existence in society. This curriculum unit should also constitute a solid foundation that will help the students to understand that the process of depriving an individual of his or her rights must be substantiated by fair and impartial procedures granted by the Constitution. I also expect my students to come away from these lessons with a keen sense of awareness of how not abiding by the law can have a highly negative impact on their future. However, most of all, I hope that these students in turn will be able to influence their future generations with their newly acquired insight into the judicial system.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson One: Ways to Be in Charge

Student Objectives

- Students will discuss effective strategies of dealing with peer pressure situations.
- Students will learn these strategies by applying them in role-plays in the classroom.

Introduction

In an attempt to draw from my students' real life experiences, I will introduce this lesson with a brain storming activity. In this activity, the children will provide examples of situations in which they or somebody they know may have found themselves being talked into doing something that they may not have wanted to do. I will then proceed to tell them that situations like these in which people are subjected to pressure from their friends or acquaintances are commonly referred to as "peer pressure." Following this, I will get them to define the term "peer pressure."

Activity One

First, I will provide my students with the following strategies accompanied by examples that they can put into practice when dealing with these types of situations:

How to Stay Out of a Risky Situation

- Avoid the situation
- Make use of the strength in numbers
- Walk away
- Give the cold shoulder

How to Get Out of Risky Situations

- Say “No”
- Give a reason or fact
- Change the subject
- Repeat refusal (Become a skipping CD)
- Use humor (*DARE Book*)

Activity Two

The students will watch a video titled *Peer Conflict*, in which a group of students tries to push a peer to get into a fight. It illustrates the power of peer pressure to provoke violence. Following this, there will be a discussion on how the participants handled the situation.

Activity Three

The children will go to <<http://www.lawforkids.org>> in pairs or groups of three and receive exposure to a variety of role-play situations dealing with peer pressure, each of which shows the potential for infringing the law. They are to select one of the situations and proceed to rehearse their role-play for about 10 minutes. In their presentation, they will need to incorporate the strategies previously discussed in class.

Activity Four

The students will then act out their role-plays in front of the class. We will follow up with a discussion on how the performers handled the “peer pressure” situation to which they were subject. We will provide feedback.

Activity Five

To finalize the lesson we will recapitulate the strategies presented, and the students will provide examples of peer pressure situations and how they should be handled.

Assessment

I will assess the students using a rubric that contains aspects such as degree of collaboration and participation, quality of the performance, appropriateness of the strategy used, and effectiveness of the strategy in deterring pressuring behavior.

Activity Six – Essay

The students will also write an essay around the theme “Ways to Deal with Peer Pressure” in which they will include the following aspects:

- What peer pressure means to me
- Sources of peer pressure
- Examples
- Ways that you can manage peer pressure
- Ways to give advice to a friend who is under peer pressure.
- Your commitment not to let yourself be influenced by this type of pressure.

Lesson Two – Understanding *The Code of Student Conduct*: Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities

Objectives

- To provide the students with some insight into the district’s discipline management plan
- To specify the behavior that is expected of all the students
- To describe the range of students misconduct and describe the disciplinary consequences or options for the various types of misconduct
- To create awareness of student rights and responsibilities

Introduction

I will begin this lesson by conducting a brainstorming activity in which the students will mention places where authority figures are in charge. Some examples are home, school, businesses, etc. I will then have them express ideas regarding the responsibilities that these people have and what it would be like if they failed to carry out their duties or if there were no authority figures at these places. From there on, I will center the discussion on the school. Who represents authority in school? What are their responsibilities? Do they apply established rules, or do they create the rules? I will then introduce *The Code of Student Conduct* as the document that establishes these rules and policies as well as students’ rights and responsibilities.

Activity One

I will set up a hypothetical situation in which a teacher finds matches and other flammable materials in a student’s desk. We will then refer to the *Code* in order to determine the level of this type of offense and the procedure to follow.

Activity Two

After the class determines the level of the offense, we will discuss the various disciplinary options and procedures.

Activity Three

Volunteer students will act out the situation taking the roles of teacher, student, and assistant principal, followed by a discussion.

Activity Four

Groups of students will analyze and perform hypothetical situations under the guidelines of the code. They will work together in groups for 10 minutes and then present for the rest of the class. There will be a follow-up discussion in each case.

Activity Five

Students will conduct interviews of people in positions of authority in and outside the school. They will present a written and oral report that should include information pertinent to the person’s position; his/her responsibilities; and how this person exercises authority, including both the difficult and the easy aspects of the process.

Assessment

I will assess students based on their participation and response, their collaboration with peers in the presentation of the role-plays, and the interview assignment.

Lesson Plan 3 – It is Up to You: Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Objectives

- To identify behavior that creates conflict.
- To explore types of conflict management behaviors
- To create awareness of the importance of mediation in conflict resolution
- To review examples of conflictive situations
- To provide students with alternative ways to manage conflicts.

Introduction

I will start this lesson by conducting a discussion on the concept of conflict. I will provide examples of situations that are conflictive so that they will reach the conclusion that a conflict is a disagreement of ideas or interests. I will then explain that to manage conflict means to solve problems peacefully instead of fighting physically or verbally. I will then provide other examples of situations so that they express their ideas as to the best ways to manage them in order to reduce conflict.

Activity 1

The students will watch a short video that illustrates conflict resolution titled *Bullying*, which is part of the Conflict Resolution Series. It portrays the predicament of an overweight student as he faces daily harassment by other children on the bus. In the second part, an older group steals the ball of a group of kids playing basketball after school and subjects them to threats (*Bullying*).

Activity 2

I will divide the students in groups of three or four and hand out a conflict situation worksheet. The groups will work cooperatively, reading each situation and selecting members to role-play the situation described. They should first decide on alternatives as to how they would manage it in order to create the least conflict possible.

Activity 3

Students will perform their role-plays in front of the class, including the various alternatives that they examine, sort of like different endings for a movie. The class will then participate in expressing their opinions as to the best ways to handle the conflicts presented.

Assessment

I will assess the students according to the quality of their collaboration in the group activity as well as based on the concepts that they express in class. They will also write an essay in which they explain their views on this subject.

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY FOR THE WORD WALL

- Appeal: The review of a case by a higher court
- Bail: Money left with a court of law that lets a person awaiting trial be released from jail: *If someone released on bail does not come to trial, the bail is lost.*
- Bailiff: A courtroom assistant to the judge
- Clerk: A court employee who keeps records. *My mother is a clerk at the district court.*
- Defendant: A person or group accused of wrongdoing and called into court. *The defendant in this trial is accused of stealing a car.*
- Juror: One of the members of a jury.
- Jury: A group of usually 12 people who sit in a court of law, listen to information about a crime, and decide if a person, business or institution has done something illegal or not: *The jury decided that the company was guilty of stealing money so the top executives went to jail.*
- Jury Duty: A period of time when a US citizen must serve on a jury if called: *I can't go to work this week because I am on jury duty.*
- Oath: A promise to do something: *the soldiers took an oath of loyalty to their country.*
- Plaintiff: In a civil action, the party who files the lawsuit. In a criminal case, the plaintiff is the state.
- Prosecution: The act of beginning and carrying a lawsuit against someone.
- Trial: A legal process before a judge or judge and jury to establish facts and decide guilt or innocence. *The state put the man on trial for theft.*
- Verdict: The final formal decision made by a jury, read before the court, and accepted by the judge.
- Warrant: A paper signed by a judge authorizing an arrest or a search and seizure.
- Witness: A person who saw something and can tell about it. *I was a witness to the accident.*

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