

Rule of Law: Discussion Starters and Writing Prompts *For High School Level and Beyond*

Directions: After watching the five-minute [Court Shorts: Rule of Law](#) video, the judge selects or modifies questions from this list. The questions can be used as discussion starters and/or writing prompts.

Court Shorts is a video series for teens and adults who want to understand current events through the lens of the Constitution's framework.

What Questions

1. What did Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor mean when she said: "I firmly believe in the rule of law as the foundation for all our basic rights."
2. What does it mean to be accountable to the law? For adults? For underage students, like you?
3. What does the rule of law mean when applied to the government and to governmental officials?
4. What does it mean to balance individual rights with the safety of others? Explain the statement: "Your right to swing your fist stops just short of my nose."

How Questions

5. How does fair and consistent adherence to the rule of law protect our rights and well-being in everyday situations like buying a breakfast sandwich? Give other examples from daily life.
6. How do we, as a society, make the lawmaking process and the laws public? How do we make legal proceedings public?
7. How do we apply the rule of law to government, not just individuals, businesses, and other entities?

Why Questions

8. Why is it important that people consent to abiding by the law? What would happen if they didn't?
9. Why would anyone follow the law in instances when it is inconvenient? Give examples.
10. Why do people follow the law even when they think there is no chance of getting caught and punished?

Timeliness Questions

11. This year is the 100th anniversary of women's legal right to vote. How did women use the rule of law to assert their right to vote? What other groups have asserted their rights using the rule of law?
12. The rule of law creates a structure for society to strive for equality and fairness for everyone. Sometimes those efforts fail. Give current examples and discuss the societal structures, systems, and practices that are in place to address such situations?

Relevancy Questions

13. Give examples of ways that the rule of law has an impact on your life every day.
14. Consider the difference the rule of law makes in your life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness by comparing your life to news events in which the rule of law is discussed as an issue.

Rule of Law: Question-Asking Activity

For a Judge Guest Program: Partner Exercise and Question-Asking Activity
For High School Level and Beyond

Directions: After watching the five-minute [Court Shorts: Rule of Law](#) video, students work independently or in pairs. Each student or pair receives a statement. Students develop a list of questions about the statement, then rank their questions so that they can ask the lawyer/judge guest one or two questions that are most important to them. Students have an opportunity to ask their questions of the guest via text message or other means.

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In a rule of law society:

1. Laws are based on a fundamental understanding that individuals are born with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
2. Laws are consistent with long-standing principles of human rights
3. Laws provide societal order, stability and restraint, including restraint of government.
4. Laws provide predictability in the business environment and the ability to enforce contracts.
5. Laws reflect the will of the people and the people consent to abide by the laws.
6. Laws are made in a public process and are available to the public.
7. Laws are enforced evenly across the board.
8. Laws that are disputed are handled in an impartial judicial process.
9. The United States is a country of laws and not of men.
10. Judges take an oath to follow the law without exception.
11. Judges are obligated to follow the law, even when their personal opinions conflict with the law in the case before them.
12. The law protects unpopular groups and unpopular opinions, political convictions, and spiritual/religious beliefs.
13. Make a list of groups that have been denied their rights. Go beyond demographic groups.
14. Give examples of how some groups have used the rule of law and the courts to assert, protect, and enforce their rights.

Rule of Law in Your Life: On the Clock
Diagram Activity and Discussion Starter
For Middle School and High School Students

Directions: After showing the five-minute [Court Shorts: Rule of Law](#) video, the judge asks students to list their daily activities. The judge leads a discussion, based on a routine school day as described by the students and helps them identify how the rule of law has an impact on their quality of life in ways they may not realize.

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1. Draw a clock face on a sheet of paper.

Only put in the numbers for

- 6 a.m.
- 9 a.m.
- Noon
- 3 p.m.
- 6 p.m.
- 9 p.m.

2. Now take about two minutes to quickly fill in the major points in your usual routine on a typical school day, from the time you wake up until you go to bed. Here is an example of what you might write in the 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. slot.

- Wake up to your alarm.
- Check social media.
- Shower.
- Head to school.
- Eat fast-food breakfast.
- Go to first-period class.

3. Now let's talk through some of the highlights of the day, starting when you wake up to your alarm.

- How does the rule of law have an impact on you when you wake up to the sound of your alarm?
 - What happens next?