"No Vehicles in the Park" is a classic lesson in the law-related and civic education field which has its roots in a debate between a couple of scholars in a 1958 Harvard Law Review article (see Bernard W. Bell, "No Vehicles in the Park": Reviving the Hart-Fuller Debate to Introduce Statutory Construction, Journal of Legal Education, Volume 48, Number 1 [March 1998], p.88). Variations of the lesson have been taught at every level from elementary school to law school by thousands of teachers. Yet, for both the student just experiencing the lesson for the first time and this lawyer/educator who has taught the lesson more than 1000 times, it remains a most involving means of entry into the world of laws.

Although the ways real-life courts interpret actual laws vary rather significantly at times from the analysis third graders and first-year law students undertake, this lesson allows students to gain an understanding of the process of statutory interpretation that is vital to their appreciation of the role and function of both the courts and the way the three branches of government interact. The "No Vehicles in the Park" lesson involves a law that declares that, due to past problems in the park, there will be no vehicles allowed in the park. I always start this lesson by asking students if they understand what the statute means and ask the students what are the elements they think a good law needs. My students usually conclude that rules should be clear, enforceable and fair. Depending on the time and my purpose in teaching this lesson, examination of what makes a good law is either explored in depth or stopped at this point. Know that there is a great teachable moment (or more) here.

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NO VEHICLES IN THE PARK

• Grade Levels: 7 - 12
• Academic Standards: Variations of this lesson abound, ranging from exercises based on children’s literature that ask which animals should be allowed in the library to lessons that explore wearing hats in school. All of the variations involve PA Civics and Government Standard 5.3, exploring How Government Works.
• Materials Needed: The student handout
• Procedure

The "No Vehicles in the Park" lesson involves a mock statute that says, due to problems in the park, there will be no vehicles allowed in the park. Ask the students if they understand the rule—and ask what they think makes up a good rule. They should suggest answers such as clarity, enforceability and fairness. Then put the students into groups of five or six and ask them to serve as participants in city council hearing petitions involving disputes over the interpretation of the law. Will they allow exceptions to the law? The classic law-related education version of the exercise is on the next page (please feel free to copy the exercise for your students). Keep in mind — there is no correct answer; the power of the activity is in the discussion explaining each answer.
The town of Barrister had a park that was being overrun by vehicles of all types. To make the park a place where residents might find peace and enjoyment, the town leaders enacted a law that reads: "No Vehicles in the Park." While the law seems clear, some disputes have risen over the interpretation of the law. Please decide the listed cases keeping in mind both the letter of the law as well as the intent of the law.

A. John lives on one side of town and works on the other side. He will save 10 minutes if he drives through the park.

B. To keep the park clean, there are many trash barrels in which people may deposit all litter. The sanitation department wants to go into the park with trash trucks to collect the trash.

C. Two police officers are chasing a suspected bank robber. If one officer cuts through the park, he or she can get in front of the suspect’s car and trap it between the patrol cars.

D. An ambulance has a dying car-accident victim in it and is racing to the hospital. The shortest route is through the park.

E. Some of the children who visit the park want to ride their bikes in the park. What about the skateboarders?

F. Mr. Thomas wants to take his baby to the park in her baby buggy.

G. A monument to the town’s citizens who died in the Gulf Wars is being constructed.

H. A tank, donated by the government, is to be placed beside the monument.

I. Several of the town’s citizens have made a living for several years by driving people around scenic spots in the city in an old-fashioned horse and buggy. They want to drive people through the park.