

Mindwalk - “The Law is Everywhere”

Grade Level: All Grades

Academic Standards:

This activity involves proposed standards 5.1.B and 5.3.C, which focus on the importance of and reason for rules and laws. Proposed standard 5.1 covers principles and documents of government and 5.3 explores how government works.

Variations of this exercise are numerous.

The Mindwalk begins by saying to students, “**I’m now going to ask you the hardest question you will ever be asked. What would you rather be doing than listening to me?**”

Ask the students to create a list (choose one or two students to write the ideas on the board until you have a list of 10 activities).

Now challenge the students with the statement that “everything is connected to the law and that is why studying the law is so important.”

Go through how the ideas they listed can be connected (sleeping involves the little pillow tags that say “Do Not Remove Under Penalty of Law”; eating costs money, which gets its value by law; winking at someone could be sexual harassment). Ask them to come up with things they think are not connected to the law in any way. Let the group work through the connections.

One presenter who has used this lesson a number of times said he only was stumped once, when a student brought up the notion of pure thought - eventually, the group decided that you had an absolute right in America to think whatever you want, a right that certain nations - the “1984” world comes to mind - do not protect.

Some other variations of this exercise...

You may use a newspaper, what a student or teacher did the previous weekend or even what documents can be found in your wallet (driver’s license, credit card).

For elementary students - ask students the current time. So approximately how long have they been awake? In that amount of time how many laws do they think have been involved in their lives? How many think it’s probably not many - maybe 0-3 (students raise hands and you or a student volunteer write the number of students on the board) how many think maybe a few more than that - 4-10? Does anyone think it’s more than 10? More than 20? Wow - let’s see if we can figure this out.

Let’s start by listing some of the things you’ve done today since you got up. Either you can write the responses on the board or if students are in grades four or five, use two student volunteers and alternate turns writing down the responses. You may have to help students by asking questions to get them started. They may be hesitant to say obvious things like brush my teeth, eat breakfast...seems too simple, but once they see these are the types of responses you are looking for, the list will quickly grow. Write everything down - try to get a response from everyone so they all feel they participated if they wanted to. Now tell the class you are all going to look at the things on the list to see if any of them have anything to do with the law. Pick one that might be more obvious to them, like their mom driving them to school. Are there any laws that have to do with driving? Try to get the students to respond with multiple traffic laws, drivers license, etc. Verbally list some (don’t write the laws on the board) but do note on the list beside driving to school a number representing the number of laws you were able to quickly note that are related to driving. The point is that at the end of the exercise you are going to go back and roughly count up the number of laws they have come into contact with so far that day.

Continue moving through the list picking activities that have a more obvious connections and challenging students to eventually find connections to everything on the list. Wrap-up by showing how many laws they have been involved with up to that point in the day and note that you really didn’t even list all of the activities or all the laws. Almost everything we do has a relationship to laws. The law is all around us. If you want to extend the lesson you can ask the students to think about the laws and activities you’ve talked about. Why are these laws needed? How do they help us? How do they make life better? What would it be like without certain laws (pick a few—what if there were no traffic laws? No laws to regulate our food supply?) Do they think we need more laws or fewer laws?

For middle and high school students, you may wish to use the approach described below:

Mindwalk: The Law is Everywhere

Tell students that you are going to narrate a “story” and that they should stop your narration when they think you have mentioned something that pertains to the law. Begin to narrate your daily activities. For example, “This morning, I awoke at 6:00 a.m. I took a shower, got dressed and ate a breakfast of cereal and coffee. I got in my car and drove to school (or office). I picked up my paycheck” etc.

The students should have stopped you at a number of places to mention points such as the following:

1. Your name is a legal device that cannot be changed without court approval.
2. Time is regulated by law. The official clock in Washington, D.C. is set in accordance with Greenwich Mean Time.
3. Water for bathing is inspected by city officials and must meet health, safety and environmental regulations enforced by local and national governmental agencies.
4. Clothing and furniture must have contents and cleaning instructions listed on a label.
5. Cereal boxes are required by law to list ingredients. Milk must be pasteurized and meet health standards. The price of milk often is regulated, as well.
6. Cars must have safety and pollution control devices that are regulated by law. The car must be licensed and insured.
7. Drivers must be licensed and must obey traffic laws.
8. Streets are built and maintained under standards regulated by law.
9. Income tax and social security taxes are withheld from paychecks by law.

As an extension of the Mindwalk exercise, you might ask the students to **generate a list of all the legal documents they will be required to have during their lifetimes.**

Among them could be included:

- birth certificate
- school registration/ ID card
- driver’s license
- graduation diploma/transcript
- marriage license
- Social Security card
- draft registration
- income tax return
- Passport
- work permit
- rental/lease agreement
- mortgage or other loan papers