



Judges in the Classroom

No Vehicles in the Park

Source:

Adapted by Margaret Fisher from *Street Law: A Course in Practical Law* (8th ed.), and updated in 2012. Staff at the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) edited the lesson. For more information, contact AOC Court Services, 1206 Quince Street SE, PO Box 41170, Olympia, WA 98504-1170. For an electronic copy of this lesson, or to view other lesson plans, visit Educational Resources on the Washington Courts Web site at: www.courts.wa.gov/education/.

Objectives:

1. Students will identify the purpose and function of law.
2. Students will discover the intent of lawmakers.
3. Students will analyze practical applications of a law.
4. Students will appreciate that laws may be subject to different interpretations.

Grade Level:

Grades 5-12

Time:

One class period (approximately 50 minutes)

Materials:

One copy of Handout 1 (No Vehicles in the Park) for each student

Note: This lesson assumes the teacher has introduced students to the concepts of separation of powers, how laws are made, and how courts are sometimes called upon to interpret the language of laws written by legislatures. The judge in this exercise will focus on the process he or she would use in determining the legislative intent in enforcing this law. The judge should stress that the goal is to determine what the lawmakers intended, not what he or she thinks the law should be. Judges can share with students the difficulties inherent in this duty.

Procedures:

1. **Begin the class by introducing yourself** and telling a little bit about what you do, if this is your first class. Tell students questions have arisen regarding how a new law should be interpreted, so they will also be judges today. Pass each student a copy of Handout 1.
2. **Ask students to read** the first two paragraphs of Handout 1. You may either have students read it to themselves or you may ask for a volunteer to read aloud.
3. **Make sure that all students understand** what the law says and the basic legislative history given before moving on to the individual cases. Check by asking questions such as:

What is the law we are to interpret?
What exactly does it say?
What is the law designed to do?
What is the purpose of the law?

You might write student responses on the board or docu-camera.

4. **Review the definition of a vehicle:** *Something on wheels that carries people or things.*
5. **Divide the students into groups** of three to five students each. Assign each group a number. (You could call group 1 the "First Circuit Court," group 2 the "Second Circuit Court," group 3 the "Third Circuit Court," etc.)
6. **Tell the class they will work in groups** to consider the cases on Handout 1. For each hypothetical situation, ask each group to decide if the law has been violated or if they will interpret the law to allow an exception. Tell each group to appoint a spokesperson or Chief Judge to report their decision (or everyone may take turns reporting). Tell them they will be expected to give their reasons for each of their answers. Ask students if they understand the group assignment. Allow 10 to 15 minutes for the groups to work.
7. **Circulate while the groups are working** to insure that they stay on task. Then draw a grid on the board to record their opinions. The grid should list the hypothetical case letters (a. through g.) along one side and the group or circuit court numbers along the top.

	Cir 1	Cir 2	Cir 3
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a.
b.
c.
etc.

7. **Read each situation** and have the groups report what they decided. Record the

responses on the grid. To get discussion started, ask some of the questions related to each situation, as suggested below and on the attached pages.

8.

Questions for Handout 1:

- a. John Smith lives on one side of the town and works on the other side. To save 10 minutes, he drives through the park.**
- Should the law be interpreted to allow John to drive through the park? Why or why not?
 - Is it important for John to be at work on time?
 - Wouldn't it save energy and gas if he is allowed to go through the park?
 - Suppose he will lose his job if he is late one more day and he overslept?
 - What might happen if you allow only John to drive through the park?
- b. There are many trash barrels in the park so that people may deposit all litter, thereby keeping the park clean. The sanitation department drives their trucks in to collect the trash.**
- Should the law be interpreted to allow the sanitation department to drive through the park?
 - Why or why not?
 - Will people come to a dirty park?
 - Isn't it unhealthy to allow trash to pile up in the park?
 - How will that trash get removed if sanitation trucks can't come into the park?
 - What other alternative trash control methods do you have?
- c. An ambulance has a dying car accident victim in it and is racing to the hospital. The shortest route is through the park, so the ambulance drives through.**
- Should the law be interpreted to allow the ambulance to drive through the park? Why or why not?
 - Suppose that, if the ambulance is not permitted to cut through the park, the patient will die?
 - Does it make any difference if there are many emergencies in Beautifulica so that ambulances would cut through the park on a frequent basis?
 - If you decide to let emergency vehicles in the park, how do you define an emergency vehicle?
- d. Two police cars are chasing a suspected bank robber. One cuts through the park, so she can get in front of the suspect's car and trap him between the patrol cars.**
- Should the law be interpreted to allow the police car to drive through the park? Why or why not?
 - What if the robber had already shot an innocent bystander?
 - Does it matter if this is the only opportunity for the police to catch him?
 - Does the police car qualify as an emergency vehicle? Why or why not?
- e. Some children are riding their bicycles in the park.**

- Will you interpret the law to allow the children to ride their bicycles in the park? Why or why not?
- Would it matter that the children used their bicycles as transportation to the park? Why or why not?
- Would it matter if several children's bikes had been stolen from the bike rack at the entrance to the park?
- Would it matter if there was a special bike path in the park?

f. Some disabled persons in motorized wheelchairs are coming to the park.

- Will you interpret the law to allow persons in wheelchairs to use the park? Why or why not?
- Should there be any difference between motorized or non-motorized wheelchairs?
- How else would these persons be able to use the park?

g. Mr. Thomas is jogging in the park with his baby in a jogger baby stroller. This stroller allows Mr. Thomas to jog or run quite fast at the same time as he is pushing the stroller.

- Will you interpret the law to allow the jogger baby stroller in the park? Why or why not?
- What about other baby strollers?
- Wouldn't it be unfair to parents with infants and small children not to be able to bring strollers into the park?

h. A monument to the town's citizens who died in the Vietnam War is being built. A tank, donated by the government, is placed in the park as part of the monument.

- Will you interpret the law to allow the tank to be placed in the park? Why or why not?
- Is there anything wrong with monuments being put in parks?
- Do you think the fact that this monument is a vehicle should prevent it from being placed in the park to honor the town's citizens?

9. **Ask the students** whether or not the law creates more situations for problems and exceptions than no law at all. Discuss whether laws should be written in great detail or if laws should be flexible to adapt to changing situations? Can they be both?
10. **Explain to students** how judges review laws like this and how they try to determine legislative intent. Share with students the difficulties inherent in this duty.
11. **If time permits**, or as follow up with the teacher, have students discuss alternatives or ways to rewrite this law.

HANDOUT 1

No Vehicles in the Park

The town of Beautifica has a lovely park in its center. The city council wishes to preserve the feeling of nature, undisturbed by city noise, traffic, pollution and crowding. It is a place where people can go to find grass, trees, flowers and quiet. In addition, there are playgrounds and picnic areas. In order to make sure the park stays as it is, the city council passed a law, called an ordinance. At all entrances to the park, the following sign is posted: "**NO VEHICLES IN THE PARK.**"

The law seems clear, but some disputes have arisen over the interpretation of the law. The definition of vehicle is *something on wheels that carries people or things*. You are a judge and the following cases have come before you. Decide how you would interpret the law to determine whether the law has been violated in each of the following cases.

- a. John Smith lives on one side of the town and works on the other side. To save 10 minutes, he drives through the park.
- b. There are many trash barrels in the park so that people may deposit all litter, thereby keeping the park clean. The sanitation department drives their trucks in to collect the trash.
- c. An ambulance has a dying car accident victim in it and is racing to the hospital. The shortest route is through the park, so the ambulance drives through.
- d. Two police cars are chasing a suspected bank robber. One cuts through the park, so she can get in front of the suspect's car and trap him between the patrol cars.
- e. Some children are riding their bicycles in the park.
- f. Some disabled persons in motorized wheelchairs are coming to the park.
- g. Mr. Thomas is jogging in the park with his baby in a jogger baby stroller. This stroller allows Mr. Thomas to jog or run quite fast at the same time as he is pushing the stroller.
- h. A monument to the town's citizens who died in the Vietnam War is being built. A tank, donated by the government, is placed in the park as part of the monument.