

---

# CHAPTER 6

## RULES AND LAWS

---

**By Fredricka L. Stoller and Katherine Reilly**

**R**ules and laws affect our daily lives. They pervade our personal space at home and at work, our recreational activities as part of sports and games, and our interactions with others at the street corner, on the highway, in the market place, at school, at the bank, in restaurants, at the post office, and so forth. Most people would agree that rules and laws provide some degree of order, predictability, and security in our lives. Yet, not all rules and laws are just.

This chapter is a 50-minute lesson that will give students the opportunity to explore select aspects of rules and laws. Students will learn the vocabulary and concepts associated with the topic, practice their English language skills, and develop an understanding of the role of rules and laws in civil societies. Teachers have the option of using the lesson plan in a variety of ways: They can create a single lesson on one aspect of the topic; they can design a series of connected lessons that explore the topic in more detail; or they can develop a thematic unit that examines the topic from a variety of perspectives over a longer period of time. These lesson plans are meant to serve as a starting point for teachers interested in introducing the topic to their students.

---

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

---

Rules and laws are ever present in our lives. In families, rules based on customs and traditions play an important role in guiding behavior, determining relationships, and establishing order. At sports events, like soccer matches and basketball games, rules dictate the behavior of players, coaches, referees, and fans. When playing games such as chess, rules specify the ways in which the chess pieces can be moved and the ways in which players may proceed. At school, rules determine teacher-student relationships in addition to how students contribute to class discussions, when students need to turn in homework, and how students must behave in and out of the classroom. In the workplace, rules govern when employees begin their workday and when the workday ends, and rules govern proper behavior and performance expectations of workers and administrators. As becomes apparent, rules are pervasive in all aspects of our lives.

Laws, often defined as rules made, carried out, and enforced by local, regional, and national governments, are pervasive too. Laws influence our lives in many ways and play many roles in society. Consider these varying functions of the law:

- Laws dictate the ways people should behave (e.g., people must respect the property of others).

- Laws specify what activities are permitted and prohibited under certain conditions (e.g., drinking under age, smoking in school buildings).
- Laws serve to maintain order, ensure predictability, and provide security (e.g., they require that people drive on a given side of the road; they require that people pay for services rendered).
- Laws in many nations spell out which individual rights and freedoms will be protected (e.g., personal, political, and economic rights).
- Laws guarantee certain benefits to citizens (e.g., schools, health services, public transportation, and garbage collection).
- Laws assign responsibilities to citizens (e.g., paying taxes and serving in the military).
- Laws define what duties the government will perform and, in some locales, limit the power of governmental officials.
- Laws can facilitate different forms of social change (e.g., toxic waste disposal, anti-discrimination, and prohibition of sexual harassment and spousal abuse).
- Laws are used to manage different forms of conflict, in turn, keeping courts, lawyers, and judges busy worldwide.

An examination of this list reveals the varying functions of laws in society. Laws serve many different purposes, though not every rule or law is a good one. Ideally, laws should be well designed to achieve a just purpose; they should be understandable so that the average citizen can interpret them. Laws that protect individual rights and that promote the common good of all citizens, regardless of class, race, religion, or ethnicity can nurture environments open to values associated with civil societies.

This introduction only briefly discusses select issues related to rules and laws. The topic is actually quite extensive. Fuller coverage of the topic would need to include discussion of the similarities and differences among international law, constitutional law, common law, religious law, civil law, criminal law, corporate law, etc. It would also need to cover issues related to equal protection and equal opportunity under law. Yet, for the purposes of this chapter, we have chosen to focus on an exploration of the purposes of rules and laws, and on issues related to fairness, usefulness, and necessity.

## CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

---

The following 50-minute lesson plan highlights select issues related to the theme of this chapter: Rules and laws. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the lesson to meet the language and content learning needs of their students. Adjustments can easily be made so that the lesson matches the needs of lower or higher proficiency English language learners.

### Preliminary Lesson Planning

#### *Materials:*

Create a "Laws and Purposes" handout for each pair of students in class ([Appendix A](#)). There are 18 laws suggested in Appendix A; an ideal number of laws for students to work with is seven, plus an example that can be used to model the activity. Choose the seven most provocative, unusual, or interesting laws from those suggested when you create your handout, or create entries of your own. Include the example below as your model entry. The handout can be adapted to different proficiency levels by using more or fewer laws from the list and by adjusting the vocabulary. A suggested format follows:

Law and Purpose	Is it fair?	Is it useful?	Is it necessary?
1. A person may not cross the street unless there is a crosswalk (no jaywalking). Purpose _____	.	.	.

Make one copy of the "New Country Rules and Laws" handout for each group of students that will be working together during Activity 2 ([Appendix B](#)).

#### *Student grouping decisions:*

During Activity 2, students will work in pairs. For Activity 3, students will work in larger groups. If appropriate, make up tentative lists of group members for Activity 3 before class. To promote as much discussion as possible, groups should have no more than six participants each. Make last minute adjustments when it is determined which students are actually in class.

### *Vocabulary considerations:*

Consider the vocabulary that students need to know to complete the lesson successfully. Determine which vocabulary items the students already know and which items they will need to be introduced to. Some important terms and their definitions are included in a glossary in [Appendix C](#). Items listed in the glossary are underlined the first time they are mentioned in the lesson plan.

---

### **Warm Up Activity (approximately 5 minutes)**

#### *Purpose:*

- To stimulate student interest in the topic of **rules** and **laws**
- To access students' background knowledge
- To introduce key vocabulary that will help students successfully complete the lesson

#### *Procedures:*

1. Write "Rules" and "Laws" on opposite sides of the board.
  2. Ask students to think for a moment about the differences between rules and laws (e.g., legal distinction and criminal punishment). Ask for volunteers to describe or define each of the words. List their explanations, noting key words, under the appropriate word on the board.
- 

### **Transition from Warm Up to Activity #1**

Tell students that they will be exploring issues about rules and laws in society.

---

### **Activity #1 (approximately 10 minutes)**

#### *Purpose:*

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way
- To introduce students to the concept of rules in relation to their daily lives
- To give students a chance to analyze the intended **purpose** of rules that affects them

#### *Procedures:*

1. Ask the class if it is "rules" or "laws" that exist at home and among their family members (the answer should be "rules"). Ask who makes the rules in their houses.

2. Give an example of one rule that you had to live by when you were growing up (e.g., I had to be home by 11:00 p.m., I could not yell at my parents, I had to clean my room). Ask students to write down 3 rules that they have to live by in their parents' houses. While they are doing this, write the word "rule" at the top of the board, on the left side; write the word "purpose" at the top of the board, on the right side.
3. Have volunteers explain one of the rules on their lists. Write each of the rules, in a shortened form, on the left side of the board under the heading "rule."
4. After listing 4 or 5 rules on the blackboard, ask the class to suggest what the intended purpose of each rule is. List the shortened purposes on the right, next to the appropriate rules on the board. Ask whether students think the rule is effective in achieving its purpose.

---

### Activity #2 (approximately 15 minutes)

#### *Purpose:*

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way
- To provide students with opportunities to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of different laws
- To reinforce key vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme of the lesson

#### *Procedures:*

1. Ask students to work in pairs. Hand out one copy of the "Laws and Purposes" worksheet to each pair of students. Tell the class that this is a list of actual laws, not rules, from several countries; violators of the laws are either **fin**ed or jailed.
2. Ask a volunteer to read the first law on the list. Ask the class to identify the purpose of the law. Have them write the purpose in the appropriate space on the worksheet. Possible student answers might include *to save lives* and *to prevent traffic accidents*.
3. Ask each pair to evaluate the first law on the handout by discussing and then answering the three questions listed to the right of the law on the handout (Is it fair? Is it useful? Is it necessary?). Remind them to consider the purpose of the law and its effectiveness in achieving that purpose. Ask for volunteers to report on group decisions.
4. Ask pairs to complete the worksheet with their partners in the same way they worked on the first law. Emphasize the need for discussion and agreement with their partners.
5. Ask for volunteers to report on the law that they found most interesting, controversial, difficult, or easy to evaluate.

### Activity #3 (approximately 15 minutes)

#### *Purpose:*

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way
- To empower students by giving them the opportunity to create something new using the information and thought processes introduced in the lesson
- To reinforce key vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme of the lesson

#### *Procedures:*

1. Have students form groups for this activity. Give one copy of the "New Country Rules and Laws" handout to each group.
2. Explain that they are the leaders of a new country and must decide both the country's name and its key laws. The 15 categories on the list are areas in which new laws must be created. Their job is to choose three of the categories from the list and create one law that helps govern issues related to each category. Each law must be fair, **useful**, and necessary; they must state the law and give its purpose (list these points on the board). They should be able to explain each law and discuss the reasons for their choices. Give groups a time limit for completing their laws (approximately 10 minutes). Depending on your students' proficiency levels, you may want to adjust the number of laws created.
3. Have students identify the most important of their three laws. After groups have made their selections, ask for volunteers to explain their most important law to the class.

### Cool Down Activity (approximately 5 minutes)

#### *Purpose:*

- To provide some closure to the lesson
- To give students an opportunity to discuss and reflect on the relevance of the lesson

#### *Procedures:*

1. Ask students to identify three elements that should be considered when laws are created. List these on the board.
2. Ask students the following question: Why is it important to understand the intended purposes of rules and laws? List abbreviated responses on the board.

---

### Possible Extensions to Lesson

- Ask students the following questions: Should parents clearly state the purposes of their rules before they have children follow them? Should lawmakers clearly define the purposes of their laws before they enact them? Why? Write key words on the board.
- Ask students to think of three rules in their homes or laws in their country that they think are **fair**. Have them discuss which aspects of the laws are fair. (This may be done orally or in writing.)

- Ask students to think of three rules in their homes or laws in their country that they do not think are fair. Have them discuss which aspects of the laws are unfair. How can the laws be changed so that they are fairer? (This may be done orally or in writing.)
- Ask students to think of three rules in their homes or laws in their country that they think are **necessary**. Why are they necessary? Why do they think the rules or laws were enacted? Who benefits from these rules and laws? (This may be done orally or in writing.)
- Ask students to think of three rules in their homes or laws in their country that they do not think are necessary. Why are they not necessary? Why do they think the rules or laws were enacted? Who benefits from these rules and laws? (This may be done orally or in writing.)
- Have students identify an unpopular school rule. Ask these two questions: Why is the rule unpopular? How would you change the rule?
- Have students think of a popular sport or game. Ask the following: Which rules are necessary? Not necessary? Fair? Unfair? How would the sport or game change without these rules?
- Ask students to create a "Declaration of Cultural Rules," identifying 10 or 15 of the rules most vital to the social success of their culture.
- Have students develop a "Charter of Effective Lawmaking," listing issues to be considered by those in charge of creating new laws.

[Back to the top of Chapter 6](#)

## Appendix A

### Laws and Purposes

1. A person may not cross the street unless there is a **crosswalk** (no **jaywalking**).
2. No one may urinate in public places, such as parks, streets, or elevators.
3. People of different races must use separate drinking fountains and bathrooms, though the facilities must be of equal quality.
4. **Littering** is not permitted.
5. All drivers and passengers of motor vehicles must wear **seatbelts**.
6. Smoking is **prohibited** in all indoor public places.
7. It is illegal to sell chewing gum.
8. All motorcycle riders must wear **helmets**.
9. It is illegal to **commit suicide**.
10. **Spitting** in public is prohibited.
11. No one under the age of 16 can get married unless parents agree.
12. Persons under the age of 18 cannot be out in public after 10:00 p.m.
13. Drinking alcoholic beverages is **prohibited** for people under the age of 21.
14. No person can make verbal or written **threats** to the leader of the country.
15. No one under the age of 18 may vote in national elections.
16. All persons must obtain a **license** to catch fish.
17. It is illegal to ask job applicants to provide photographs of themselves.
18. No one under the age of 16 can obtain a driver's license.

[Glossary](#)

[\(back to Classroom Applications\)](#)