

## Lesson 7: How Government Works and Developing Laws

### Overview

Students learn about the three branches and three levels of government. Students learn why laws are necessary and the requirements of an effective law. They will create laws to be in effect the day they attend Young AmeriTowne.

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

- List the three levels and three branches of government.
- Explain the function of each of the three branches of government.
- Explain why laws are needed in society.
- List characteristics of effective laws.
- Develop laws for their own community at Young AmeriTowne.

### Preparation

- ✓ Review ***Young AmeriTowne Laws*** following this lesson.
- ✓ Review any school or classroom guidelines for expected behavior on field trips.
- ✓ Decide how additional laws will be chosen, whether each class will choose one law or three laws will be chosen by all classes together in one large group.
- ✓ Have a white board or flip chart to write proposed laws for students to see.

### Discussion

Ask students to name reasons we need a government. Then, ask the students if they can identify the three branches of government. Answer: Legislative, judicial and executive. Next, ask students to name the institutions that perform the functions of the branches at the federal, state and local levels. Look for answers that match those listed below.

- Executive Branch - carries out laws
  - Federal – The President of the United States is the country's Chief Executive and Chief of State. The president's responsibilities include signing bills into law or vetoing the bills; enforcing laws; commanding the armed forces; making treaties with foreign governments; appointing judges, ambassadors, and other important officials and performing ceremonial duties.

- State – Governor
- Local – Mayor
- Legislative Branch - makes laws
  - Federal – Congress has the authority to declare war, overturn a president’s veto, approve or reject appointments and treaties made by the president, impeach a president or judge and propose constitutional amendments.
  - State - State Assembly
  - Local - City Council
- Judicial Branch - interprets laws
  - Federal - Federal Courts; the Supreme Court is the nation’s highest court. One of the Supreme Court’s primary responsibilities is to determine whether federal, state and local governments are acting according to the Constitution. The Supreme Court decides specific legal cases based on the Constitution. Once the Supreme Court has reached a decision, all other courts throughout the United States must follow the decision in similar situations. Justices on the Supreme Court hold office for life.
  - State - State Courts
  - Local - County Courts

Review the ***Young AmeriTowne Laws*** that follow this lesson. These are laws that all students must obey while at Young AmeriTowne.

Discuss any other expectations for student behavior. Remind students that while at Young AmeriTowne, school policies, rules or guidelines still apply. For instance, students are not allowed to steal from businesses or try to hold up the bank just as they are not allowed to steal at school. Sometimes students think staging a bank hold-up would be fun.

Ask students if they think laws are necessary. Have the students share why or why not. Encourage a lively dialogue between opposing views. Have students consider that laws are needed for:

- Order
- Fairness
- Safety
- Control

Divide students into small groups and have them work together in groups to come up with at least three requirements that a law must meet in order to be considered to be a good law. Ask for a spokesperson from each group to share their requirements. List them on the board and then engage students in a discussion about each requirement. Look for a list similar to this:

- Clear and easily understood
- Includes how the law is to be enforced
- Identifies who must obey the law
- Outlines consequences of breaking laws

Based on the earlier discussion regarding the three branches of government, ask students to describe the democratic process upon which laws are approved. Can students identify who is responsible for proposing laws in Young AmeriTowne?

Answer: Citizens of Young AmeriTowne make up the legislative body that proposes and votes for new laws.

Ask students who is responsible for the enforcement of Young AmeriTowne laws and consequences of breaking them? Answer: Laws are enforced by police officers. Accused persons appear before the Judge to plead their case. Judge determines innocence or guilt and issues the fines.

### **Activity: Developing Young AmeriTowne Laws**

Explain that students may create laws that are silly and fun. For instance, laws might involve wearing a silly hat, dancing when passing the Radio Station or reciting the school motto before entering a shop. Remind students that the laws created must be fair, easy to enforce and cannot conflict with existing Young AmeriTowne laws or school rules.

**Note: Please avoid laws that will distract students from performing their work tasks or laws directed at one particular group of students.**

If all students are meeting together as a large group, have them vote for three laws. If students are meeting in classrooms, have each classroom vote for one law.

Make a list of suggestions for laws and allow students to vote. Explain that all students must follow laws decided by other groups as well as their own.

### **Summary**

Ask students to predict who will carry out the functions of government in Young AmeriTowne. Answer: Executive Branch - Mayor; Legislative Branch - citizens; Judicial Branch - Judge. Explain that the Mayor and Judge will be chosen by the students through a primary and general election. Anyone may run for the offices by entering his or her name as a candidate in the primary election. From those who run, students will vote for four candidates for each office. Students will then work on one of the eight candidates' campaigns by creating slogans and posters. After the campaigns are complete, students will vote for their candidate in the general election. The winners of the general election will serve as the Mayor and Judge of Young AmeriTowne.

Remind students that if the police arrest them, they may not resist arrest and they will be taken before the Judge who may find them guilty and impose a fine. Young AmeriTowne does not have a jail. It is possible that if a student is arrested and does not have enough money in his or

her checking account to pay the fine, the Judge will sentence the student to perform community service, such as trash pick-up for a minute or two. If the Judge has not yet been elected, students may be interested in candidates' views on interpreting laws.

## Young AmeriTowne Laws

It is the responsibility of each Young AmeriTowne Citizen to respect the rights of all other Citizens.

It is also the responsibility of each Citizen to obey the following Young AmeriTowne Laws:

Respect yourself and others at all times

Running is not allowed at any time

Littering is prohibited

Gum chewing is not allowed

Leaving Towne limits is prohibited

Eating or drinking is prohibited in all shops except the Snack Shop.

Citizens must also obey all laws enacted by majority vote back at school.