

SHAMUS AND THE CONSTITUTION

Grades K-6 as modified below

Academic Standards: Academic Standards for Civics and Government
5.1A, B, C, E, F, I, J, L; 5.2 A, B, C, F, G; and 5.3 A, B, D & G

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LEAP-Kids.

This lesson plan is based on the short story “Shamus and the Constitution” created by past Pennsylvania Bar Association Young Lawyer Division Chair J.J. Clark, a U.S. Attorney and mother of three who created the story of a young squirrel named Shamus whose tree community is being disturbed by squirrel bullies. In the story, Shamus learns about the rule of law and the three branches of government and uses that education to help the rest of the squirrels create a safer and fairer community, free of bullying and other problems. Book copies of the story are available while supplies last from the Pennsylvania Bar Association; you can download the story from (????).

LESSON OVERVIEW:

Depending on grade level, the students will either listen to or read a story about a squirrel named Shamus who is having a difficult time getting along with his squirrel friends. The story, and this lesson based on the story, demonstrates how learning about the three branches of government helps Shamus and his squirrel friends solve their problems.

GOALS:

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Have a basic understanding of the U.S. Constitution and the three branches of government;
2. Identify the three branches of government;
3. Discuss why it is important to follow the laws in our school and in our community;
4. Explain about peaceful ways to resolve conflicts; and
5. Identify strategies for dealing with potential bullies.

MATERIALS:

Each student will receive a copy of “Shamus and the Constitution”. The story can be downloaded from the Pennsylvania Bar Association website at (Tina—add the website link here—is it up? I couldn’t find it). Copies of such elementary materials as “The U.S. Constitution and You” by Syl Sobel would also add to this lesson but are not needed for the basic lesson.

Tina, can we also have a tree to fill in for the branches of government and leaves for rights and responsibilities????

ACTIVITIES:

1. The students will break up into three groups after reading the story. One group will be the executive branch, the second group will be the legislative branch and the third group will be the judicial branch. Each group will find out information about their branch of government. Each group will receive a picture of a tree with three branches. (Tina, can we create three trees for this part of the lesson?) They will each fill in information about the branch of government they are in charge of. Each group will be asked to share with the rest of the class the information about the branch of government they were reading.
2. After the class discusses the three branches of government, the students will be given an opportunity to make some laws up for the classroom and/or the school. Each group will be expected to use the information that was discussed in order to make the laws. The students will write a letter to Shamus and his friends to make sure the squirrels understand why it is necessary to obey laws. The students will also write about the laws they follow in school everyday.

Extensions of the Lesson

Look at the lesson, “No Animals in the Library”, at <http://www.pabar.org/educationprograms.shtml> under Lessons by Pennsylvania Teachers. This lesson is a wonderful primer on how to draft rules and laws at the elementary level.

The class can create a tree of rights and responsibilities, listing all of the rights (to learn, to be safe, to be loved) and responsibilities (come to school

ready to learn, keep weapons out of school, care about others) students have in their school. The rights and responsibilities listed here are just a few of the dozens listed by students at Overbrook Educational Center in Philadelphia during Law Day 2006 activities at the school.

Some schools will use the Shamus story to focus on bullying issues. The story is a wonderful way to introduce School Rules Against Bullying.