

Lesson 1

Good law – bad law

What makes a good law?

Learning objective	To be aware of and understand the factors that determine what makes a good law.
Student tasks	To discuss school rules and identify what makes a good school rule. To discuss laws and identify what makes a good law. To examine critically an area of law in their country, e.g. laws on alcohol. To propose and justify their own new school rule or law.
Resources	Two cards for each student – one labelled with a letter “A” (in green), the other with a letter “B” (in red). Handout – Laws on alcohol in our country. Marker pens and a large piece of paper each for group of 4-6 students. Flip chart or a large piece of paper for display in class.
Method	Whole class discussion and small group work.

Information box

The method used in this lesson is known as “inductive learning”. This is where the teacher helps students to understand abstract principles by basing them on concrete examples. The lesson begins with such examples – in this case examples of rules or laws – and students are encouraged to draw out general principles from these. Here, the principles are the criteria that can be applied to rules or laws to judge whether they are good laws or not: Are they fair? Are they useful? Are they for the good of all? Can the police enforce them? Are they simple to understand and obey?

Where specific material is needed, for example, laws on alcohol as they apply in the country, the teacher or the students have the task of feeding this material into the lesson.

The lesson

The teacher begins the lesson by giving each of the students two cards – one labelled with a large letter “A” (in green) and the other with a large letter “B” (in red).

The teacher explains to the students that they are going to hear some imaginary school rules and they should decide whether they think these would be good rules or bad rules. For good rules they should hold up card “A”, and for bad rules card “B”.

The teacher reads out the imaginary school rules one by one. Each time, the students must hold up one of their cards – depending on what they think of the rule. The rules used could include:

- homework is banned;
- no bullying;
- students should have to pay to come to school;
- no chewing gum to be brought to school;
- students must like all their teachers;
- students should be able to choose which classes to go to;
- older teachers should have an easier timetable;
- no mobile phones in school.

For each one, the teacher should ask two or three different students to justify their decisions:

- Why do you think it is a good/bad rule?

The students’ ideas should not be further discussed or commented on at this stage.

Then the teacher should divide up the class into groups of 4-6 and ask the students to try to pinpoint the factors that make a school rule a good one:

- What makes a good school rule?

The groups should present their ideas to the class as a whole.

Next, the teacher repeats the whole exercise with the class – reading out statements, the students holding up their cards and justifying their decisions, etc. – but this time focusing on imaginary laws, rather than school rules. The laws used could include:

- all citizens should have to follow the same religion;
- murder is wrong;
- no telling lies;
- junk food should be banned;
- citizens should be allowed to decide for themselves which side of the road they drive on;
- women should be paid the same as men.

Then the teacher should ask the students to return to their groups and try to pinpoint the factors that make a law a good one:

- What makes a good law?

The groups should present their ideas to the class as a whole. In doing so, the teacher should try to steer student thinking towards a number of key criteria that can be applied to laws and that help to make them good laws. They include:

- fairness – justice and equality, such as equal pay for men and women;
- usefulness – making society run smoothly, such as laws on driving to make roads safer;

- common good – not just supporting the interests of particular groups, such as the wealthy;
- enforceability – the majority are willing to obey them, police are able to catch those who break them;
- simple – easy to understand and to obey, not too complicated.

When the class has agreed on these criteria, they should be displayed in the classroom on a flip chart for everyone to see. The title for the display should be “What makes a law a good law?”.

The teacher should then ask the students, in their groups, to study a law or area of law from their country (such as the laws on alcohol). This material should be provided on a handout. If more time is available, the students can obtain other material that they are interested in, for example, the rights and duties of children and teenagers. The groups are each given marker pens and a large piece of paper and asked to prepare a presentation to the class on whether they think the law(s) they have chosen are good laws or not – using the principles they have previously identified and that are displayed on the classroom wall.

Groups make their presentations to the class.

As a final exercise or a homework assignment, students could be asked to propose a new law or a new school rule on a topic of their choosing, such as the environment, and to prepare arguments for its introduction in terms of the key principles they have identified.