

No Pets Allowed

Overview

In this lesson, students learn not only that there is a need for rules, but that it is important to understand why a rule was made in order to obey it sensibly. This activity explores the purpose and intent of rules or laws and helps students realize that overly simple laws are difficult to interpret and good laws are difficult to write. This lesson is a good introduction to the writing of the Constitution and the role of legislators in developing laws.

Grade Levels

2-3

Objectives

Students will:

- Compare and contrast the “letter of the law” with the spirit and intent of the law by using critical thinking skills.
- Become aware of the difficulties in devising clear, fair laws.
- Practice developing arguments supporting opposing points of view.
- Discuss the pros and cons of a current problem that affects daily living and personal choice.

Materials

- Student Handout 1—No Pets Allowed
- A chalk line on the board as marked below

Procedures

1. Tell the class that this lesson is about people who live in an apartment house in a big city. There is a sign on the front door that says “No Pets Allowed.”
2. Ask students why the owner of the building might want this rule. Elicit answers to the effect that pets can be noisy and dirty and can damage apartments. Some people in the building might be allergic to pets. Furthermore, the landlord wants a quiet, clean, low-maintenance building. Explain that with rules and laws, we need to keep in mind not only exactly what the law or rule means, but what the people who wrote the rule or law intended it to mean.

Adapted from a lesson by Carolyn Pereira and Anna Bowie. That lesson was itself adapted from a lesson in Educating for Citizenship, a joint curriculum of the Constitutional Rights Foundation, the Law-Related Education Program for the Schools of Maryland, and the National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law.

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3. Write *Should Be Allowed*, *Should Not Be Allowed* on either end of the chalkboard with a space in between as shown below:

Should Be Allowed _____ **Should Not Be Allowed**

4. Distribute a copy of **Student Handout 1 (No Pets Allowed)** to each student in the class.
5. Choose five students to become a human graph for the first situation. If there seems to be interest, you may want to choose a new group of five for each situation.
6. Explain to the class that you will read several situations. Members of the human graph will react to each by standing in front of the sign that corresponds with their opinion. Be sure to tell students that if they are undecided they can stand somewhere in between the two signs. Tell the class that the members of the human graph are not allowed to speak, so the rest of the class will have to interpret their thoughts for them.
7. Read the first statement on **Student Handout 1**. Ask the students creating the human graph: Given the “No Pets Allowed” rule, do you think this should be allowed or should not be allowed? Allow time for the human graph students to understand the statement and react by physically moving towards one sign or the other. Be sure to tell the human graph students they are allowed to change their positions at any time if they hear arguments that they find persuasive.
8. Now ask the rest of the class to give reasons why they think students have taken those positions. You may choose to let the human graph students briefly explain their positions after the seated students have commented.
9. Continue with this process until all statements have been evaluated and discussed. As the students work through the statements, remind them to keep two questions in mind: “Why was the rule made?” and “Is it a pet?”
10. If there is time at the end of the activity, ask students if they think the rule needs to be written more clearly. Either in class or for homework, have the students attempt to rewrite the rule.

For the Teacher or Attorney Leading the Lesson

Below are some arguments for and against allowing the animal in the building in each statement. Students may add other arguments.

Statement	For	Against
1. Keep a dog who cannot bark	Small, cannot bark	Sheds, may cause allergies, waste disposal causes maintenance problems
2. Tropical fish	Small, hairless, not messy, confined, primary purpose is for decoration, not as a pet	Technically a pet, could cause water damage if tank spills
3. Guide dog for person who is blind	The Americans with Disabilities Act makes this a legal right*	Sheds, may cause allergies, waste disposal causes maintenance problems
4. Bird in a cage	Small, does not shed, clean, confined	Could be noisy
5. Squirrel on windowsill	Animal is not in the building	Tenant is attracting animal to stay around the building, could be messy, squirrel could carry insects that spread disease
6. Ant farm science project	Confined, not messy, could be considered a science project rather than a pet	Could be messy if ant farm breaks
7. Drug-sniffing dog	Temporary situation, could argue that it is not a pet	Could cause allergies, could be noisy, waste disposal causes maintenance problems
8. Beehive for honey business	Bees are not in building; a business, not a pet	Could cause injury to people, could be messy

*This act mandates, in part, that Americans with disabilities may not be denied equal access to housing. Therefore, a guide dog must be permitted to live at the residence of a disabled person.

Student Handout 1

No Pets Allowed



All of the people listed below live in an apartment building. The building has a sign on the front door that says “No Pets Allowed.” Read each statement. What do you think? Would these animals be allowed? Why or why not?

1. Mary has a friend who is going away for a month. Mary would like to keep the friend’s dog while she is gone. It is a small dog that cannot bark. Should this be allowed?
2. Mrs. Soto wants to get colorful tropical fish. She thinks they will make her apartment look more cheerful and interesting. Should this be allowed?
3. Mrs. Perez has lost her sight. She wants to get a guide dog. The dog will help her at home and in the community. Should this be allowed?
4. Mr. Tucker lives by himself. He is lonely. He would like to get a bird for company. The bird would live in a cage. Should this be allowed?
5. Ms. Brown lives in an apartment on the first floor. She leaves nuts on her windowsill for a squirrel. The squirrel comes to the windowsill every day. Should this be allowed?
6. Paul is doing a science project on ants. He wants to keep the ant farm at his house during spring vacation. That way, he can continue working on his project. Should this be allowed?
7. Mr. Goldman is a police officer. One Friday night, he works very late with his drug-sniffing dog, Buster. By the time he goes to drop Buster off at the kennel for the weekend, the kennel is closed. Mr. Goldman brings Buster home for the weekend. Should this be allowed?
8. Mr. Muhammad wants to keep a beehive on the roof of the apartment building. He will sell the fresh honey his bees make. Should this be allowed?