



TAKE ACTION: WHAT IS AN ORDINANCE?

Distance Learning Lesson Plan

Lesson Overview

We are in an unprecedented moment in our history. Beyond impacting their everyday lives and experiences, this pandemic will shape young people's faith in government and how responsive it is to community needs. **That's why, in the midst of all of this, we want students to hear loud and clear: in a crisis, our democracy doesn't pause.** At this moment, our young people have thoughts, feelings, and reactions—and we know civics can provide students with an authentic space and guidance to express those responses and use their voices.

In “What is an Ordinance?” middle and high school students write their own local law in order to better understand some fundamental questions about local governance: Why do ordinances exist? Where are they recorded? What do they mean? They will start by piecing together their own “Fill-in-the-Blank” Ordinance and describing the consequences it might have on their city or town. Then, after learning some basic vocabulary related to local laws and the structure of codes of ordinances, they'll develop their own ordinance based on an issue they see in their own community. **Before Beginning, we encourage you to find and share your own locality's code of laws; links to many of these can be found in the [Municode Library \(bit.ly/2VzOpKM\)](https://bit.ly/2VzOpKM); [eCode Library \(bit.ly/2VwKmPp\)](https://bit.ly/2VwKmPp); or the [American Legal Code Library \(bit.ly/2VNDjTH\)](https://bit.ly/2VNDjTH).** *(Please note that all lesson components can be completed without this information.)* At the end of the lesson, students will share their proposed ordinance on social media and are encouraged to tag some or all of their local representatives in the post.

Note for Teachers: We understand that municipalities write and/or organize their local laws differently. Procedures for agreeing on and enforcing those laws are accordingly diverse: a community that employs direct democracy through Town Meetings may function very differently from one with a Board of Selectmen, just as some cities use Boards of Aldermen while others have City Councils. In this lesson, we focus less on structures of government and more on the structures of the ordinances that comprise them. For a helpful list of common forms of municipal government, the National League of Cities created a resource you can find [here \(bit.ly/2RVBQsp\)](https://bit.ly/2RVBQsp).

Civic Knowledge The structure, powers, and processes associated with the branches of government, including at the local level.

Civic Skills Communicate persuasively, both orally and through written work, to mobilize others.

Civic Motivation Appreciation for the role of government, and its limitations.

What is an Ordinance? Lesson Plan

Materials and Preparation:

- **Handouts:**
 - Understanding Local Legislation (PDF <https://bit.ly/2yZuZr2>, Google Doc <https://bit.ly/2yCSq4U>)
 - Structure of an Ordinance (PDF attached <https://bit.ly/3d3r00g>, Google Doc <https://bit.ly/2YkL9Gf>)
 - Ordinance Template (PDF <https://bit.ly/3bWCihW>, Google Doc <https://bit.ly/2VRty7I>)
 - Sample Ordinances (PDF <https://bit.ly/2VS1h0s>, Google Doc <https://bit.ly/2Wge0sq>)
- **Optional: Find Your Code of Laws** (Municode: bit.ly/2VzOpKM; eCode360: bit.ly/2VwKmPp; or AmLegal: bit.ly/2VNDjTH)
- **Optional: Important Legislative Terms** (PDF <https://bit.ly/2ye7UB3>, Google Doc <https://bit.ly/3bRLog3>)
 - Excepted from the National Conference of State Legislatures' Glossary of Legislative Terms (bit.ly/2KbgxhW)
 - Our recommended vocabulary: *Amendment, Code, Clause, Enacting Clause, Statute, Title*
- **Suggested:** Consider reviewing the legislative branch of government by implementing the Guide to Government lesson (bit.ly/2zD3sMs)
- **Optional: Video from Flocabulary:** Three Branches of Government Video (bit.ly/2PNYj7D and Transcript (bit.ly/3aQDUbw)
 - If you do not have a Flocabulary account, visit www.flocabulary.com to create a FREE account. (Note: you only need one account for all of your students to access the video.)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Analyze a city or town ordinance.
- Develop an ordinance that benefits their community.
- Write a reflection that explains the impact of their ordinance, and the importance of local legislation.

Today's Agenda

- ❑ **Do Now:** Understanding Local Legislation
- ❑ **Mini-Lesson:** structure of an Ordinance
- ❑ **Worktime:** Write Your Own Ordinance
- ❑ **Wrap-up:** Tactic: Post on Social Media

Take a look at this sidebar for instructional tips!

TECH TIP: If using virtual facetime (ex. Zoom or Google Hangouts), ask students to speak their answers or share their responses using the “chat” feature.

TIP: You can access the ordinance used in this activity in the Providence, RI Code of Ordinances (bit.ly/3eJeMqG).

TIP: Encourage students to find their Code of Laws by visiting Municode: bit.ly/2VzOpKM; eCode360: bit.ly/2VwKmPp; or AmLegal: bit.ly/2VNDjTH.

DO NOW 10 MINS

Understanding Local Legislation

Frame:

- New laws are passed during each legislative session at the federal, state, and local level that impact you and your community. It’s important to be able to read and understand legislation that’s being passed in real time so you can know *how* it will impact you and your community.
- Lawmakers create legislation on almost any topic like, for example, slippery banana peels being thrown on public sidewalks!

Task:

- Open **Understanding Local Legislation** and read the Ordinance from Providence, RI and answer the questions that follow.
- Amend, or change, the ordinance by changing some of the words in the ordinance and answer the questions that follow.

“No person shall cast, throw, place or deposit on any sidewalk or crosswalk in any street or public place within the corporate limits of the city, any part or portion of any fruit or vegetable or other substances which, when stepped upon by any person, is liable to cause or does cause such person to slip or fall.”

Debrief:

- The first ordinance you read, was a law that was passed in Providence, Rhode Island
- The fill in the blank, was your adaptation of the law.
- Ordinances govern issues not already covered by state or federal laws such as zoning, safety and building regulations.
- What are residents in your city or town not allowed to do? There just might be an ordinance on that issue!

TIP: For a review of the legislative branch of government, consider using the “Guide to Government” lesson or the 1-page activity listed in the materials section above.

TIP: If you have time, consider asking students to brainstorm as a group (or individually) and write what you think it might mean and compare with the dictionary definition.

TIP: Consider having students read this article from The Cincinnati Enquirer to learn more about the city’s ordinance protecting residents from discrimination regarding natural hair and natural hairstyles associated with race (bit.ly/2Wab3Ka).

TIP: Discussing laws and how they’ve impacted students or their families can raise sensitive information and emotional reactions.

MINI-LESSON 15 MINS structure of an Ordinance

Frame:

- It’s important to recognize the features of a Code of Ordinances so that you can better understand the ordinance itself.
- Reading and understanding an ordinance is an important civic skill that will help you fact check citations (like receiving a ticket for throwing a banana peel) and justify your actions (or refusals to act) in public spaces. For example, as of 2019 Cincinnati residents who experience discrimination based on their natural hair or hairstyles associated with race have a law they can reference. Of course, this new city ordinance is much more helpful if they are aware of it and understand it!
- Are there other words you commonly hear used by or about your local government? What are they?

Tasks:

- Read **Structure of an Ordinance**.
 - Review common vocabulary featured in ordinances.
 - Chapter, Article, Title, Section, Subsection, Body
 - Read the sample ordinance from Biddeford, Maine. Match each component from the box provided to the ordinance.
 - Complete **Activity: Annotate an Ordinance** by filling in the chart provided with each part of the provided ordinance.

Debrief:

- Now that you understand the structure of an ordinance, let’s prepare to write our own ordinance!
- Think back to your fill-in-the-blank ordinance from the **Do Now**.
 - Are there any weird or interesting laws in your community?

WORK TIME 30 MINS

TECH TIP: Consider having students select their own sample ordinance from another state on the MuniCodes website.

TIP: If time allows, have students share their ordinances and ask for 1-2 amendments to be made. Students may need a mini-lesson on amendments before doing this.

TECH TIP: If your virtual class is using Zoom, consider creating “Breakout Rooms” ([Tutorial on Managing Breakout Rooms](#)) where students can collaborate in small groups to respond to these prompts.

TIP: Consider having students work in pairs to write their ordinance.

Write Your Own Ordinance

Frame:

- An idea for a new ordinance can come from several different sources such as a local politician, a private citizen’s concern, in response to state or federal action, or a council, board or committee meeting.
- Once the individual or group decides the most effective way to deal with an issue is by creating a new law, they draft a proposal.
- Today you’ll identify an issue that you’re concerned about and draft an ordinance to address that issue. Naturally, there’s a lot of research necessary when drafting an ordinance proposal, but for now we’ll just practice your drafting skills.

Tasks:

- Open the **Ordinance Template** document.
- Brainstorm a community issue to address in your ordinance:
 - What is an issue that is currently impacting your community? Here’s a list of some of the issues concerning Generation Citizen students along with others you might consider:
 - Rent payment, street cleanliness, speed limits, sign sizes, noise pollution, biker safety, quarantine snacks, instagram live, distance learning.
- Once you decide on your issue, answer the following questions which will help you develop the content of your ordinance:
 - *Why does this issue matter to your community?*
 - *What do you think could help fix this issue?*
 - *What should be the consequence for someone who does not follow this ordinance?*
- Write your ordinance:
 - Give your ordinance a title. For example, “*An Act on Protections for Students in Boston*” or “*An Act on Learning from Home in Oklahoma City*”
 - Become familiar with the sample ordinance that is attached in the materials section. Make sure to pay attention to the vocabulary used and the way the ordinance is formatted.
 - Include a chapter number, article number, and section number.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Include up to 2-4 subsections in your ordinance. Subsections should be labeled a), b), c), etc. <p>Debrief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Now that you've written your own ordinance, how do you envision it having an impact on your community? Why is it important for people to understand the types of ordinances being created by their local government? Write your debrief in 3-5 sentences.
<p>TIP: Many students do not have social media accounts for a variety of reasons. Consider polling your class using Google Form or Strawpoll prior to engaging in this lesson.</p>	<p>WRAP-UP 5 MINS</p> <p>Tactic: Post on Social Media</p> <p>Frame:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many ordinances are developed after local governments hear from their constituents that something needs to be changed. In order for legislators to know your ideas, you have to share it with them! You can share your ordinance via social media and/or via text to your network to try to mobilize other people to create your ordinance. A great way to do this is by reaching out to your city/town representative, such as the city councilor for your district. ● You can inspire others. Tell everyone—your friends and family, neighbors and co-workers—that you want your city/town government to enact an ordinance that doesn't currently exist in your community. <p>Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Post a screenshot or take a photo of your ordinance on social media. ● Don't forget to add #democracydoesntpause and tag @generationcitizen on Instagram or @gencitizen on Twitter ● Consider including a call to action for your followers to retweet, repost, or send their own message. ● Tag your city/town representative—they may respond!