

Activity 1A: Perceptions of Crime and Justice



Students create and share poems that reflect their perceptions of crime and justice. They are introduced to the components and goals of the criminal justice system.

Sequence

1A.1	Students view video clips and explore their perceptions of crime and justice by creating a group poem.
1A.2	Students share poems, discuss their perspectives on crime and justice, and learn about the components of the criminal justice system.
1A.3	Students read the unit overview and assessment checklist.
1A.4	Students review the unit's journal assignments and complete Journal 1.

Materials Needed

- Selected video clip(s) of a TV crime show (see *Advance Preparation*)
- **Handout 1: Crime and Justice Poem**
- **Handout 2: Overview of the Criminal Justice System**
- **Handout 3: Unit 3 Overview**
- **Handout 4: Unit 3 Assessment Checklist**

Activity 1A: Perceptions of Crime and Justice

1. Show the video clip(s) and have students create poems about crime and justice.

Introduce the unit by showing students the opening sequence of an episode of one or two popular TV crime shows.

Ask students to write words, phrases, and feelings that come to mind as they watch the scene.

Have several volunteers share their responses. Record a list on chart paper.

Possible answers: Scary, violent, random, dangerous, dramatic, exciting

Ask students:

- How do these kinds of TV shows depict crime?
- How, if at all, do these shows address the idea of justice?

Possible answers: "The bad guy" usually gets caught in the end; justice is often achieved when the criminal is "locked up," making the community a safer place.

- Do you think the media in general—dramatic shows as well as news programs—depict crime accurately? Why or why not?

Tell students that they are going to explore their perceptions of crime and justice, first individually, then with their classmates. **Distribute Handout 1: Crime and Justice Poem.**

Ask students to respond individually to the prompts in Part 1 of the handout. Point out the examples provided that they can use for guidance.

Have students meet in groups of three or four and share their responses. Ask each group to create a group poem by combining the group members' individual responses. Have students write their group's poem in Part 2 of the handout.

Teacher's Note: Collective Poetry

Collective poetry encourages students to share ideas and combine their voices to tell a story. Students collaborate to form a unified voice while still maintaining their unique perspectives. Collective poetry fosters individual creativity and allows students to learn from each other's ideas.

2. Have groups share their poems and discuss their perceptions of crime and justice.

Have groups read their poems aloud. Ask students:

- What are some common themes in the poems?
- What similarities and differences do you notice in the way that justice is defined and described?

Note: Keep or post collective poems for students to revisit in Activity 4D.

Teacher's Note: Creating a Working Definition of *Justice*

This activity is designed to be open-ended. Students will define *justice* in many different ways. Be sure to encourage students to reflect on their perceptions and to synthesize their ideas into their own working definition, using the following definition as a reference:

- **Justice:** The principle of fairness, which may be determined by equity, moral rightness, or righting a wrong.

- Where do you think people's perceptions of crime and justice come from? What has informed your own perceptions?

Possible answers: *Some students may have personal experience with crime, either as a victim or from knowing someone who works in law enforcement. For many students—whether they realize it or not—their understanding and perceptions of crime and justice are derived from the media.*

Display the term *criminal justice system*. Tell students that in this unit, they will explore how communities and the legal system respond to crime and attempt to achieve justice, and consider issues that emerge in society due to differing approaches to crime. Ask students:

- What is the *criminal justice system*? What are the components of the criminal justice system?

Possible answers: *The components of local, state, and federal government that respond to crime: law enforcement (police), the courts, and the correctional authorities*

Distribute **Handout 2: Overview of the Criminal Justice System**. Ask students to read the entire overview and answer the questions on the last page. Tell them that they can take notes as they read the overview, which might help them answer the questions.

Teacher's Note: Literacy Strategy: Previewing the Text

Have students preview the text in order to help them focus on essential information and to read with a purpose. Students can skim the document by reading the title and headings and take notes on what these items tell them about the content of the reading. Encourage students to identify and highlight unfamiliar vocabulary words. After previewing the text, students can share notes with a partner and then individually read the document in its entirety. See the *Law and Justice Teacher Toolkit* for additional information on this and other literacy strategies.

Have students discuss the questions at the end of the handout with a partner. Ask volunteers to share their responses with the class. Ask:

- How does this overview of criminal justice connect to the descriptions/perceptions in your group poem?
- Does the system as described here match your perceptions of the criminal justice system? Why or why not?

Tell students that they will use this information about the criminal justice system throughout the unit as they take on roles to investigate and respond to a crime.

Opportunities for Integration

Work with an arts teacher to explore how visual arts, dance, theater, and music have contributed to a public discussion on crime and incarceration. Have students plan, develop, and present an arts project drawing on their work in Unit 3. Their project should represent their response to one of the framing questions from the unit. See *Media Resources* for links to sample arts projects.



3. Present an overview of the unit.

Distribute **Handout 3: Unit 3 Overview**. Have students read the questions at the beginning of the overview. Ask students the following:

- Why do these questions matter?
- What examples from real life can you think of that relate to these questions?

Tell students that they are going to explore how the criminal justice system tries to balance the goals of ensuring public safety and protecting individual rights. Explain that throughout the unit, they will come back to the question “What is *justice*?” and consider the extent to which the criminal justice system is just.

Point out the key vocabulary used in the unit and the unit journal assignments.

Note: An extensive list of vocabulary words is available online. See *Media Resources*.

Distribute **Handout 4: Unit 3 Assessment Checklist**, which describes the requirements for the unit. Answer any questions students may have.

Teacher's Note: Introducing the Unit

Spend ample time reviewing the unit overview. This will help you set clear expectations and establish a common understanding of the goals and purpose of the unit. Make it clear to students how their work will be assessed in this unit.

4. Introduce the unit journal assignments and assign Journal 1.

Review the journal assignments listed on Handout 3. Have students complete Journal 1 for homework or in class.



Journal 1

How do you define *justice*?

After a crime occurs, what do you think justice would look like for the victims?
What would it look like for the accused? For the community?

Note: Journal assignments offer a good opportunity for formative assessment. Students should include their journal entries in their Career Portfolio.
