

Table of Activities in the Unit

Part 1: Bringing a Law to Life (6 sessions)

Students learn about school-related laws and policies and discuss what values each law reflects. Students develop a problem tree as a way to explore school safety issues. They look at possible factors that led to the creation of the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994, considering both media and community responses to incidents of school violence. Students examine the legal landscape of the GFSA, exploring how different branches and levels of government interact to create, enact, and enforce a law. They analyze the role of public advocacy in influencing laws and policies.

Activity 1A: What Leads to a Law or Policy?

Students read and discuss several federal and state school-related laws and policies, and discuss the context for the creation of these laws. Students identify the different interests represented in the school safety laws and policies, and discuss the unit overview.

Activity 1B: The Roots of a Problem

Students learn how to use a problem tree as a graphic organizer, and examine a sample problem tree. Students read about and respond to synopses of news articles about school shootings. As a class, they create a problem tree to analyze the effects and causes of unsafe schools.

Activity 1C: Community Responses

Students identify potential community responses to school safety issues, including legislation. They discuss the purpose of written laws in addressing social problems and protecting the community, and they learn about the unit project.

Activity 1D: Now That It's the Law . . .

Students explore the context for the creation of the GFSA, including the viewpoints of various community stakeholders, such as parents, school administrators, gun owners, politicians, law enforcement officers, and students.

Activity 1E: Exploring Public Advocacy—The Fourth Branch

Students explore the role of public advocacy within the legal landscape. As a preview for their research for the unit project, they consider different forms that advocacy work may take. Students do a preliminary exploration of advocacy organizations that have responded to school safety laws, and choose one whose work they support.

Activity 1F: Enacting a Law

Working in government branch groups, students read about and discuss how different sectors of the legal landscape interpret and implement the federal GFSA, and the impact of this law on different stakeholders. Students create a mind map to illustrate their understanding of how their branch of the legal landscape responded to the GFSA (in terms of policies, programs, or legal cases).

Part 2: Enforcing a Law (4 sessions)

Students trace the connections between the GFSA as a federal law and state and local school safety policies. They explore New York City's Impact Schools Initiative to consider the many roles that law enforcement plays in maintaining safe schools, including onsite investigation and enforcement of school safety policies, violence prevention efforts, and participation in education programs. Students analyze data to learn about the effects of school safety policies on youth.

Activity 2A: From Federal to Local

Students learn how the GFSA was interpreted by sharing their mind maps and examining state and local school safety policies. They explore New York City's policies as an example of the role played by law enforcement in implementing laws and policies and promoting safe schools.

Activity 2B: Enforcement in Action

Students explore and discuss different ways that law enforcement works to address school safety and the different perspectives held by stakeholders in the school community.

Activity 2C: Discretion or Zero Tolerance?

Students read and respond to school safety scenarios about students who were accused of violating school safety policies. They discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of discretionary policies and zero tolerance policies.

Activity 2D: What Do the Numbers Say?

Students analyze data to examine how students have been affected by school safety laws, including zero tolerance policies stemming from the GFSA.

Part 3: Advocacy and the Law (5 sessions)

Project teams discuss their findings about how their organization defines the school safety problem. Students are introduced to the Research Planner and the questions they will research, and they take on project tasks. Students research how public advocacy organizations have responded to laws and policies on school safety. They examine how organizations use data to support their campaigns and how they interact with other legal sectors. Students continue to do research in preparation for their presentation.

Activity 3A: Focusing the Research

Students discuss the Research Planner and the questions that will guide their research and assign team members to research and project tasks.

Activity 3B: Advocacy Responses

Students examine how different advocacy organizations target different aspects of the problems related to school safety. Students critically examine how advocacy organizations use language and imagery to define a problem and frame a campaign.

Activity 3C: Supporting Advocacy with Data

Students evaluate the credibility of a resource and explore how data are used to draw conclusions or support arguments. Students learn the difference between *causation* and *correlation* and apply this knowledge to a closer look at causal statements made by their chosen advocacy organization.

Activity 3D: Public Advocacy and the Legal Landscape

Students explore how one advocacy organization works within the legal landscape—how it responds to laws and policies and interacts with other branches and levels of government. Students continue working on their unit project.

Activity 3E: Team Research

Project teams check in with each other and finish their research.

Part 4: Effective Presentations (4 sessions)

Students critique multimedia presentations and explore what makes visual presentations effective. They learn about and develop talking points for their own presentation and continue working on their project.

Activity 4A: Multimedia Presentations

Students explore the components of effective multimedia presentations. In their project teams, they identify the type(s) of media (digital and/or print) they would like to use for their presentation, and work on incorporating their assigned pieces into the presentation.

Activity 4B: Oral Presentations

Students learn the characteristics of effective oral presentations and continue to prepare for the community forum.

Activity 4C: Final Preparations

Students finish preparing for the community forum and complete their research summaries.

Activity 4D: Peer Feedback

Students learn and practice guidelines for giving and receiving feedback, then conduct peer conferences on one another's talking points and visuals.

Part 5: Taking It Public and Reflecting on the Experience (4 sessions)

Student teams present at the community forum and respond to questions from community members. They discuss the feedback sheets completed by forum participants. Students reflect on the unit understandings and take the unit exam.

Activity 5A: Community Forum

Students participate in a community forum in which they share research findings, information about their advocacy organization, and ideas for promoting school safety in the local community.

Activity 5B: The Power of Public Advocacy

Students read the feedback from community forum participants. They reflect on their understandings about the legal system and the role of public advocacy as the fourth branch of government.

Activity 5C: Unit Reflections

Students reflect on the unit understandings.

Activity 5D: Unit Exam

Students take the unit exam.