

TEENS ON THE STREET

PREPARATION/MATERIALS:

- * Handout of proposed law
- * Copy of actual proposed law, if one exists
- * Table plaques for mock city council meeting
- * Outside resource person (city government official)

OBJECTIVES:

- * Discuss city council procedures
- * Describe how a city ordinance is reviewed
- * Identify the role a good citizen can play in law making
- * State a position for or against a proposed law
- * respond correctly to input
- * reflect on another's opinion

WORDS TO KNOW:

city council
curfew
individual rights
ordinance

interpretation
exceptions
fairness
intent

LESSON PRESENTATION:

I. Introductions and objectives

- A. Review lesson objectives. Check knowledge of words to know in context.
- B. Ask a member of your city council to participate. Send a copy of the lesson prior to the class.

II. To begin the lesson - ask the following questions:

- A. Do your parents impose a curfew on you? Should your parents? Should the government impose a curfew on youth?

NOTE: As communities become more concerned about violence by and against teens, teen curfew laws are being enacted across the USA. These laws regulate the hours a youth under the age of 17 can be out on the street. A curfew law in Dallas, TX, was upheld by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

Proposals are currently being drafted or have been enacted in: Washington, DC; Denver, CO; Orlando, FL; Dickinson, ND; Little Rock, AR; Atlanta, GA; and Baltimore, MD. Some communities welcome the idea of a curfew, while others feel it unnecessarily restricts teenagers' individual rights and will be arbitrary in its enforcement. On May 31, 1994, the U.S. Supreme Court denied a petition to review the constitutionality of the Dallas ordinance, simultaneously opening the flood gates for other cities to pass curfew laws.

III. CITY COUNCIL MEETING: SHOULD THERE BE A CITY CURFEW FOR YOUTH?

- A. Tell the students that they are going to consider a proposed teen curfew law as members of city council in a mock city council meeting. Introduce the resource person and explain her role. Distribute Handout 1, the proposed law (or use an actual city one). Read and clarify.

The proposed law:

It will be an offense for persons under the age of eighteen to be out of their homes from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. Sunday through Thursday nights. On Friday and Saturday nights the curfew shall be extended until midnight. Excepted are: young people chaperoned by adults, attending a planned community activity or traveling to or from work.

- B. Ask the students: Who would oppose this law? Who would support it? Brainstorm a list of opponents and supporters and discuss briefly some of the main reasons for their position.
- C. Divide the students into 5 groups and assign them each a role; Group 1 will be the city council and meet with the resource person to discuss their procedure and prepare questions for the 4 community groups. Groups 2 - 5 will be concerned community groups that are testifying before the council to influence the decision concerning the curfew law. (See student handouts 2-5) Allow the groups 15 -20 minutes to prepare their testimony and select a group member to present at the city council meeting.
- D. For groups 2 - 5, use some of the groups suggested by the students or:

* Police Department - **opposes law**

Possible arguments:

- 1) The proposed curfew requires too much time and energy to enforce.
- 2) There are enough laws to combat illegal drug use and violence.
- 3) If a juvenile does break the curfew, paper work and official filing of the offense will take officers off the streets where they are desperately needed.
- 4) Officers don't want to alienate the youths or perform the duties of their parents.

* D.C. Merchants Association - **opposes law**

Possible arguments:

- 1) Teens are customers at local stores and movie theaters. If they are prohibited from frequenting places of business because of the curfew, the businesses could lose money.

- 2) Employed teens should not be hassled on their way home from work by police checking to see if they have a job or are just loitering.

* **Families Against Violence - supports law**

Possible arguments:

- 1) Parents and students believe that the curfew would help stop some of the drug trade and illegal activity that takes place in the community.
- 2) The government should assist parents with disobedient and out of control children.
- 3) The bill will promote family communication about following rules and solving the problem of teen violence.

* **School Board - supports law**

Possible arguments:

- 1) Youth spend their time outside of school unsupervised which can lead to delinquent behavior. The law can help provide the necessary supervision.
- 2) Students should be home doing homework and preparing for the next school day..

D. Place name plaques on all five tables. Call the City Council meeting to order. Proceed as instructed by the resource person. Have each community group present their position and answer questions from the council.

E. The city council should hold a discussion "in the round" whether to

enact the law, change it or veto it. They should give their decision and rationale based on the most compelling arguments presented to them.

- F. After the students have given their decision, ask them: Is this a fair process? Why or why not? Would they like to make decisions like curfews for their city? Why would it be difficult? Should citizens testify before the council? What purpose does it serve? What would they change about the process?
- G. The resource person debriefs the decision based on his opinion of what might actually happen in your city. Allow time for the students to question her.

IV. SUMMARY

Poll the student for and against the curfew laws. How many voted for and against? If it passed, what should be the penalty for violating the law? If it did not pass, discuss how students can send letters to city council members expressing their opinions about the pending law. As a follow-up activity have small groups draft letters with their reasons for not wanting a city curfew for teens.

STUDENT HANDOUT #1

PROPOSED CURFEW LAW

It will be an offense for persons under the age of eighteen to be out of their homes from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. Sunday through Thursday nights. On Friday and Saturday nights the curfew shall be extended until midnight. Excepted are: young people chaperoned by adults, attending a planned community activity or traveling to or from work.

STUDENT HANDOUT #2

POLICE DEPARTMENT

OPPOSES LAW

Possible Arguments:

- 1) **The proposed curfew requires too much time and energy to enforce.**
- 2) **There are enough laws to combat illegal drug use and violence.**
- 3) **If a juvenile does break the curfew, paper work and official filing of the offense will take officers off the streets where they are desperately needed.**
- 4) **Officers don't want to alienate the youths or perform the duties of their parents.**
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)

STUDENT HANDOUT #3

FAMILIES AGAINST VIOLENCE

SUPPORTS LAW

Possible Arguments:

- 1) Parents and students believe that the curfew would help stop some of the drug trade and illegal activity that takes place in our community.
- 2) The government should assist parents with disobedient and out of control children.
- 3) The bill will promote family communication about following rules and solving the problem of teen violence.
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)

STUDENT HANDOUT #4

LOCAL MERCHANT'S ASSOCIATION

OPPOSES LAW

Possible Arguments:

- 1) Teens are customers at local stores and movie theaters. If they are prohibited from frequenting places of business because of the curfew, the businesses would lose money.
- 2) Local merchants also employ many teens who should not be hassled on their way home from work by police checking to see if they have a job or are just loitering.
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)

STUDENT HANDOUT #5

SCHOOL BOARD

SUPPORTS LAW

Possible Arguments:

- 1) Youth spend their time outside of school unsupervised which can lead to delinquent behavior. The law can help provide the necessary supervision.
- 2) Students should be home doing homework and preparing for the next school day.
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)