

The Rule of Law and an Independent Judiciary – Why Do They Matter to You?
50-minute Program for Distance Learning

Program summary: Students meet and work with a judge to understand the phrase “rule of law” and its importance in society and the students’ daily lives. Next, students and the judge will discuss the importance of an independent federal judiciary and how that relates to the rule of law.

Program goals:

1. Develop an understanding the rule of law and an independent judiciary.
2. Apply those concepts to the students’ daily lives.
3. Practice oral communication skills.
4. Meet and learn from a federal judge.

Time	Activity
10 mins.	<p>Welcome!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief introduction from judge (name, title, location of your courthouse, and the topic of today’s program) • Brief introduction from student ambassador (selected student introduces him/herself and teacher, class, school, grade, and location of school) • Judge encourages student participation during the program and explains ways to alert the judge of desired participation: raise hand, raise virtual hand in Zoom, (possibly write comment/question in chat box which is locked to prevent private chats but allows entire group chat). • Let’s practice! Judge asks students to raise a hand if they would respond yes to a question (questions can include: who tends to help friends or family resolve a fight?, who likes to write?, who enjoys reading?, who is a good listener? . . . characteristics of a judge)
10 mins.	<p>What does “the rule of law” even mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-activity question: can anyone define the phrase “rule of law”? • U.S. Courts YouTube video: The Rule of Law • What are some key words, ideas, or descriptions of the rule of law from the video that caught your attention? • Discuss the role that the Constitution plays in the rule of law (i.e. we are a constitution-based government)
10 mins.	<p>What is an independent (or impartial) judiciary?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does “impartial” mean? • Let’s see what judicial independence means to these judges. U.S. Court YouTube video: An Impartial Federal Judiciary • What are some key words, ideas, or descriptions of an independent, impartial judiciary that caught your attention? • What happens when the judiciary is not impartial or independent?

5 mins.	<p>How do the concepts of “the rule of law” and “independent judiciary” fit together?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think? • Ask the judge what he or she thinks!
10 mins.	<p>The rule of law in action in the courts!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to education: <i>Plyler v. Doe</i> • Voting rights: <i>Harper v. Board of Elections</i> • How do these cases illustrate the rule of law? • What cases have you learned about in school that illustrate the rule of law?
5 mins.	<p>Final Q&A with Judge</p>