

SOCIAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT

YOU AND THE LAW: COURSE #282

Contact Information

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The Department's Educational Philosophy

The goal of the Social Studies Department is to provide students with the information and skills necessary to act as responsible global citizens. To achieve this goal we facilitate the process whereby students develop an understanding of American culture. Culture includes the unique characteristics of American society – its social structure, economic system and political organization. An understanding of American society must be grounded in a knowledge of the general patterns of western civilization from which American culture evolved. In an age of increasing global interconnectedness, it is vital to develop an awareness of and appreciation for other cultures.

Guiding Principles

All social studies students should:

- Demonstrate an awareness of the major factors involved in the development of civilizations from the Middle Ages to the present.
- Acquire useful and relevant information about the world in which they live.
- Develop the necessary skills to gather further information about whatever interests them.
- Think critically about sources of information, both primary and secondary, recognizing bias and viewpoint and separating fact and fiction.
- Interpret the world around them in such a way that they can make responsible decisions and act upon them effectively.
- Develop personal values and a sense of their own worth and dignity as individuals.
- Respect and appreciate one's own culture and way of life, as well as those of others.
- Be aware of the dependence of humans on their total environment and develop a personal concern for the preservation of an environment worth living in.
- Possess a sense of responsibility toward others and a willingness to work in a cooperative way for the common good.
- Develop a respect for learning and a desire to continue to learn beyond the opportunities provided by formal education.

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Course Frequency: Semester course, five times per week

Credits offered: Two and a half

Prerequisites: None

Background to the Curriculum

This course has been offered as an elective in the social studies department for several decades. It was first developed and taught by former teacher and athletic director Jack Schofield; then it was taken over by former teacher, Jim Gifford.

While there are no specific state or federal standards regarding Law, the course does focus on several pre-existing standards covered in other curriculum areas, including United States history, civics and government.

For more information on this course and its current organization, contact Rick Kilpatrick in the high school Social Studies department.

Core Topics

“You and the Law” is broken into several units, with the greatest time spent in three major topic areas: constitutional law, criminal law and civil law. The topics are covered in this order so as to first provide a basic understanding of law, its origins and how the constitutional background of our legal system greatly impacts other areas of law.

Course-End Learning Objectives

<u>Learning objectives</u>	<u>Corresponding state standards, where applicable</u>
<p>Students will comprehend the basic history and background of our legal system, the rights afforded to them, why these rights exist, and where they came from. They will cast a more educated and critical eye on the law and its impact on citizens.</p> <p>Students will synthesize how such rights and various laws can impact their daily lives, both as students and as adults.</p> <p>Students will recognize the make-up and inner workings of our legal system, as well as the numerous professions available to those considering a career directly or indirectly involved with law.</p>	

Unit I: Background and History of Law

This is a one-week unit in which students are introduced and consider the basic premise and purpose of laws. How are they made? Where did the ideas of our legal system come from? This is a brief yet important unit, since it creates the background needed to look at specifics within our legal system. Students will:

- 1] Understand the history of our legal system and where our principles of law came from.
- 2] Compare the American system of law to that of other nations, specifically European or Continental law.
- 3] Investigate how laws are made in the United States, at all levels of government.

Unit II: The Judicial System

This two-week unit explores the set-up and workings of our current judicial system at all levels. How many courts are there? Where are they located? What court does one appear in for certain types of proceedings? Students will:

- 1] Explore the current judicial system at various levels, with the greatest emphasis on the state and federal systems.
- 2] Understand both the history and modern day workings of the United States Supreme Court.
- 3] Investigate landmark Supreme Court cases, their historical relevance, and lasting impact on American society.
- 4] Examine the Massachusetts State Judicial system, with emphasis on the seven types of state courts.

Unit III: Constitutional Law

This unit runs for approximately four weeks. It is a crucial part of the course, as it creates the basic constitutional understanding of law needed to further investigate other areas (i.e., criminal and civil law). The unit also includes a class visit from a local police officer. Students will:

WHI.6-7; USI.2, .5, .8-21; USG 1.2, 1.9, 2.1, 2.2, 2.5, 3.13

USI .11-21, .41, USII .25-27, .32, USG 3.13, 3.4, 3.9, 5.7

USI .7-21, .41, USII .15, .31, USG 1.5, 1.9, 3.11, 3.4, 3.5, 5.7

some semesters the class has welcomed a visit from the Middlesex County District Attorney Martha Coakley. Students will:

- 1] Research the various types of criminal acts, the specifics of such crimes, and the potential punishments they carry.
- 2] Compare and contrast the different types of categorical crimes, from misdemeanors to felonies; the courts these cases are tried in; and the manner in which these trials are administered.
- 3] Comprehend the steps in a criminal proceeding, from arrest to booking, to arraignment, to preliminary hearings to trials. In addition, research the steps of an actual trial.
- 4] Examine the various roles that professionals play in the criminal justice process: judges, prosecuting and defense attorneys, probation officers, court officers, witnesses and defendants.
- 5] Research some high profile criminal cases in American history and their social and historical impacts.
- 6] Compare criminal law to that of juvenile law. How are the processes similar and different? What changes have taken place in Juvenile Law over the past decade? Have these changes worked?

Unit VI: Civil Law

This four-week unit will examine several aspects of civil law, beginning with tort law and followed by examinations of family, housing and consumer law. Students will also have the opportunity to observe civil litigation while visiting the Suffolk County courthouse. Students will:

- 1] Understand the fundamental differences between civil law and criminal law.
- 2] Research and comprehend the definition and various types of torts, including the four types of “intentional torts to the person of another,” its defenses, and the five types of “intentional torts to a person” and its defenses.
- 3] Examine additional types of torts, including negligence, strict liability, products liability and defamation.

USG 1.6, 2.2, 3.4, 5.10

<p>4] Explore family Civil law. Students will understand the legal aspects of marriage, parenthood, childhood, divorce, separation, and annulment.</p> <p>5] Explore Consumer law. Students will comprehend the legal requirements of both oral and written contracts, warranties, and tenant/landlord agreements.</p>	
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Assessments

Student assessment comes from a variety of sources, including quizzes, tests, projects, class work, homework, effort and class participation and discussion. Quizzes usually include matching and short answer questions, while tests usually include multiple choice, matching, short answer and short essay questions. Projects include investigating landmark Supreme Court cases and researching significant high-profile criminal cases. Homework is assigned regularly and often includes researching, reading and reacting to current event stories relating to law. A cumulative final grade is given at the end of the semester.

Technology Learning Objectives Addressed in This Course

(This section is for faculty and administrative reference; students and parents may disregard.)

<u>Course activity: skills &/or topics taught</u>	<u>Standard(s) addressed through this activity</u>

Materials and Resources

- Teacher notes, outlines and overheads
- Classroom visits from local attorneys, the Middlesex District Attorney’s office, Judge Robert McKenna, Larry Spiller (retired corrections officer), School Principal Stephen Donovan, and Acton Police Officer Scott Howe.
- Law in the Classroom – activities and resources. Mary Jane Turner and Lynn Parisi.
- What Are My Rights? – questions and answers about teens and the law. Thomas A. Jacobs, J.D.
- Street Law – a course in practical law. Le P. Arbetman, J.D., Edward T. McMahon, J.D., and Edward O’Brien, J.D.