

# WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

## Lawyers In the Classroom CONSTITUTION DAY LESSON PLANNING GUIDE

### Visit Agenda & Tips

#### 1. Welcome and who you are (~3 min)

- **Goal:** set a warm, curious vibe. Students who feel comfortable will participate more — and that's what makes the visit memorable. Be a real person before you're a lawyer.
- **Before you start:** briefly check in with the teacher not just about logistics already covered in the planning section, but about anything live that day (a student who had a hard morning, a sensitive topic to avoid, whether the class runs loud). Thirty seconds at the top makes a real difference.
- Do this:
  - Introduce yourself by first name, where you're from, and what you do in plain words ("I'm a lawyer" — or judge, paralegal, and so on).
  - Give a 2–3 sentence bio in kid terms: what kind of law you do, what a normal day looks like, one thing you like about it.
  - Say why you're there today: you pledged, along with hundreds of legal professionals across Washington, to connect with and visit a classroom around Constitution Day.
- Grade notes:
  - K–5: keep the bio concrete — "I help people who are having a disagreement figure it out fairly." Skip the jargon.
  - 6–8: open with a hook — "Has anyone here ever thought something was unfair? That's basically my whole job."
  - 9–12: you can be candid about what the work is really like, including the hard parts.

**Tip:** Ask the teacher to introduce you briefly first. It gives you a soft landing and a little authority in the room.

#### 2. Why this year, why the Constitution (~5 min)

- **Goal:** set the stakes and introduce the core ideas you chose.
- **Protect the activity.** With 50 minutes or less, something has to give — where you can cut back will be during the framing and takeaways sections upfront — not the main event. That's where students will remember you.

- Do this:
  - Name the moment: 2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence (1776). The country is having a big birthday — and the next 250 years belong to them.
  - Explain the Constitution simply: it's the country's founding document — a set of promises about fairness, rights, and how we make decisions together. It belongs to everyone, including them.
  - Work in the two core Constitutional ideas, in plain language.
  - Add one honest beat: it's a work in progress. The promise hasn't always matched reality, and each generation works to close that gap. That's the invitation to them.
- Grade notes:
  - K–5: “promises our country made to everyone who lives here.” Try the rulebook metaphor — a game with no rules isn't fun or fair.
  - 6–8: connect to their lives — rights at school, what happens when rules aren't followed fairly.
  - 9–12: you can introduce tension — an independent judiciary, checked power, rights that have been fought for. Honest, not preachy.

**Tip:** *Don't lecture the history. Two or three sentences of framing, then make it about them. A throughline that works at every grade: “The next 250 years are yours to lead.”*

### 3. What it means for you: 2–3 takeaways (~5 min)

- **Goal:** set up what the students should watch for ahead of the activity. These takeaways pair with your two Constitutional core ideas: the principles are *what* the Constitution is; the takeaways are *why* it matters to them. Make it personal and portable - they should leave holding onto a couple of ideas.
- **Before you start:** write your takeaways on the board. It signals to students that the visit has structure and they're expected to track it — and it gives you a natural anchor to return to during the debrief.
- **Pick 2–3 takeaways** (no more). Some options to choose from:
  - The law belongs to you. It's not just for lawyers — it's a tool everyone gets to use.
  - Your voice counts. Speaking up about something unfair is how the system stays honest.
  - You can be part of this — as a voter, a juror, a leader, or a lawyer or judge someday.
  - Fairness is something we build, not something we're handed.

- Do this: say each takeaway in a sentence, give one concrete example from their world, then move on. This is a 5-minute beat, not a lecture — the activity is where it all comes together.
- Grade notes:
  - K–5: one or two takeaways, very concrete.
  - 6–8: tie each to a recent example or a quick scenario.
  - 9–12: invite pushback — let them test the idea.

#### 4. The main event — activity or discussion (~20 min)

- Goal: this is the heart of your visit. The most memorable route is an interactive activity — kids remember what they do, not just what they hear — but it's not the only one. Pick the format you'll be most engaging in, because a confident speaker beats a shaky activity every time.
- This guide doesn't prescribe the format. If you run an activity, choose one from the **Constitution Day Curriculum Library or Lesson Toolkit**, that fits your grade and core ideas — no need to invent anything. A few directions, by grade:
  - K–5: rules-of-the-game activities, simple fairness scenarios, simplified mock-trial roles.
  - 6–8: short debates, "what rights do you actually have at school?", a statutory-interpretation puzzle ("No Vehicles in the Park"), an intro to the Bill of Rights.
  - 9–12: a full mock trial, a free-speech or civil-liberties debate, constitutional-reasoning exercises.
- Read aloud and discuss (especially K–3). The lowest-prep route, and a good first visit: bring a short civics-themed picture book, read it aloud, then talk it through. The book carries the front half (10-12 minutes), so your job is to draw out the discussion — where the civics actually lands. Tying the story back to one core idea with a few "what would you do?" or "was that fair?" questions. Because the read and discussion needs more room, keep your intro and wrap-up short to fit. See the list of read-aloud books below.
- If you'd rather talk, build it around your two core ideas — a real case told grade-appropriately, a "what would you do?" scenario, or a few questions you put to the room. A short video clip (two to five minutes) can anchor the talk or kick off discussion. Aim for back-and-forth, not a monologue. See the short video picks below.
  - Precautionary tip: download or cue the clip ahead of time — don't count on playing it live from a link.
- Working with your teacher in the room – consider inviting them to participate. They can model engagement for students, play a role in the mock trial, add context you don't have, or simply jump in when the room needs a nudge. If things go sideways, a quick glance their way is all you need.

**Tip:** *Keep it simple, one thing done well beats three rushed ones. It's a conversation with the teacher — their classroom, their call if they have a preference — so land on something you'll enjoy running. Whatever you choose, build in a moment to set it up and a moment to debrief ("What did that show us?").*

## 5. Wrap-up, Q&A and career conversation (~17 min)

- **Goal:** land the plane, open the floor, and plant a seed about what a life in law looks like. This is often the best part of the visit — protect this time. If you're running long in the activity, trim there, not here. Consider asking the teacher upfront whether students will be more curious about the profession and your personal career journey — most will say yes. For many students, you're the first legal professional they've met.
- Do this:
  - Tie back to the opening: 250 years ago, people made some promises; today those promises are theirs to keep and improve.
  - Offer one forward-looking line: someday they'll vote, serve on a jury, lead something — maybe even practice law. The country they'll build is up to them.
  - Open the floor. If it's quiet, prime the pump with a question you'll answer yourself ("A lot of people ask if being a lawyer is like on TV — want to know?").
  - Keep 2–3 of your own questions ready in case the room is shy.
  - Name the range: lawyers, judges, paralegals, legal aides, clerks — lots of ways to work in and around the law. You don't have to be a lawyer to be part of justice.
  - Connect it back: the skills they're already building — making an argument, listening, weighing evidence, standing up for fairness — are the skills this work is built on.
  - Use any remaining time to talk about how you got here: what you studied, that there's no single "right" path, and that you don't have to come from a legal family.
- **Visiting Olympia?** If the class is touring the Capitol, tie the wrap-up to what they'll see — the promises in action at the Legislature, the Governor's office, and the Supreme Court next door.
- Grade notes:
  - K–5: expect "have you ever met a bad guy?" energy. Roll with it.
  - 6–8 and 9–12: expect questions about pay, law school, and real cases. Answer honestly and grade-appropriately.

**Tip:** *Let Q&A run the clock. If questions are flowing, stay with them — the career conversation will happen organically. If the room wraps early, the path-to-law talk is your natural closer. Either way, it's always fine to say, "I don't know." That's a good lesson too. And if the conversation gets cut short, let that be your reason to come back — students who've met you once will have twice as many questions.*

## A few things to keep in mind:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>You are the lesson.</b> The single most memorable thing is a real legal professional in the room. You don't have to be perfect.</li> <li>• <b>Less content, more connection.</b> Cutting material is almost always the right call.</li> <li>• <b>Let the teacher steer.</b> It's their classroom and their students. Check in on what works.</li> <li>• <b>Keep it nonpartisan.</b> How the system works, not your take on any case.</li> <li>• <b>Arrive early.</b> Allow 10–15 min for check in at the front office.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>No photos of students</b> without explicit parental permission. Adults and your "I Took the Pledge!" badge are fine (see the Volunteer Toolkit).</li> <li>• <b>Don't over-research.</b> Pick two core ideas, know your lesson, and trust your experience. They'll remember how you made the Constitution feel like theirs — not how many dates you memorized.</li> <li>• <b>Sept. 17 isn't the only day.</b> If Constitution Day is hard to schedule, any point in the year works.</li> <li>• <b>Don't show up empty-handed.</b> A bar card or courthouse badge gives students something concrete to latch onto.</li> <li>• <b>Skip the full suit.</b> Business casual is the safe call — approachable beats formal.</li> </ul> |
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