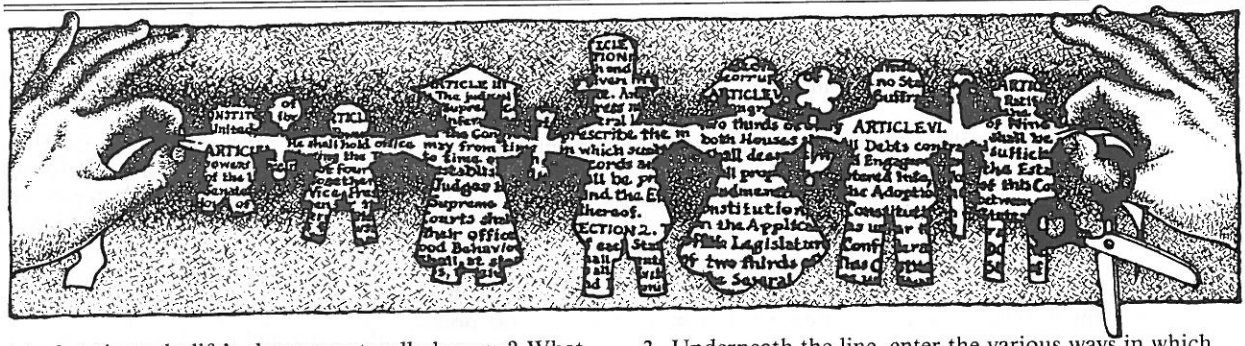
Power

It's My Life/Secondary

Jennifer D. Bloom



Susan Wise

At what times do life's changes naturally happen? What are these changes? Where does government intervene? Is this intervention fair? What are the governmental reasons for intervention? Are these good reasons? Where does government receive the authority to do this? What would happen if government didn't intervene?

The Constitution spells out possible governmental action that has been deemed necessary for the preservation of basic American values: justice, fairness, equality, freedom, etc. However, most students believe that only lawyers and judges concern themselves with the Constitution. This activity is an attempt to relate the Constitution and state and federal action to the lives of all students in the classroom.

It's My Life is an activity that has been used by lawyers in many Minnesota classrooms. Although the focus of the activity presented here is government power, the activity is also a very good way to introduce the wide variety of laws that exist, to teach about the legal implications of becoming an adult, to discuss the need for additional laws and the changes in existing laws, etc.

Objectives

1. Introduce governmental regulation of individual activities.
2. Consider the authority for governmental action: state and federal constitutions.
3. Consider the rationale for governmental action.
4. Compare individual rights with the public good.
5. Compare natural occurrence of life's events with the times of governmental action. (For example, the inability to continue working with mandatory retirement.)

This activity will take one class period (more if students are to analyze Constitution, Bill of Rights, etc.) It should be done as a general discussion with the entire class.

Procedure

1. Draw a long line on the blackboard. At one end write birth, at the other write death.
2. Instruct the students to brainstorm various events in their lives. Enter these events in chronological order at the top of the line. (Examples are learn to walk and talk, go to school, retire.)
3. Underneath the line, enter the various ways in which law has intervened in the life events. (For example, the law says children cannot get married before age 16.) Compare intervention with non-intervention. (For example, age at which a girl can become a mother.) Consider the reasons for intervention: public policy, possibility of successful intervention, etc.
4. Discuss the impact of technology on life events (birth, death, child bearing) and the frequent failure of law to keep pace with technology. (For example, invitro fertilization, life sustaining measures.)
5. Consider life without governmental intervention. Questions to ask:
   a. Does law unnecessarily interfere with the right to live one's life as one chooses?
   b. Does law protect some people's rights (minority rights to equal employment)?
   c. When does the public need and welfare override individual rights?
6. Discuss the "right to pursue happiness" as stated in the Declaration of Independence. Look over the life line, identify the times when the government interferes with one's pursuit of happiness. What does happiness mean? What did the signers of the Declaration of Independence mean by the word? Has the meaning changed over 200 years?
7. Look at the Constitution. Find sections that give government authority for its actions. Discuss the historical development of the public's need and governmental response. (For example, students realize that when they begin working they find they are paying income taxes. Discuss with them the development of taxes.)
8. Considering technological developments and legal trends, brainstorm the picture of a life line in the year 2187.
   a. What new laws might be necessary?
   b. Will governmental intervention be more or less?
   c. What individual rights might be in jeopardy?
   d. What individual rights might receive more protection?
9. Discuss possible citizen action that can help ensure a "happy" life line in the future.

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