

2021 *Civics Education Essay Contest*

What does the rule of law mean to you?

Elementary School Winners

1st place: Sabina Perez, 4th grade



"The rule of law is like a shield defending me from unfairness. It makes me feel brave to stand up for my rights and to speak up to help others. The rule of law is important because it helps people with different opinions join together and live in harmony. It builds and connects communities, and it keeps America strong. Because judges apply the rule of law fairly, I am safe and have nothing to fear. I know I will be educated, and education is power. This makes my future bright."

2nd place: Katie Drummond, 5th grade

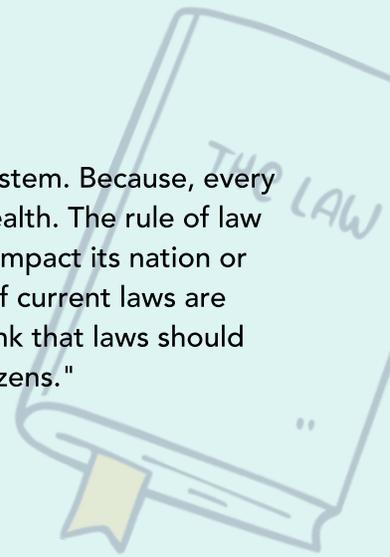


"When I think of the rule of law, it reminds me of an ecosystem. Because, every member of that ecosystem is affected by its changes or health. The rule of law is similar because when lawmakers make laws, those laws impact its nation or society that those laws are for. If new laws are created or if current laws are changed, it will affect its whole nation or society. I also think that laws should be easy to access, understand, and apply equally to all citizens."

3rd place: Holden Cone, 5th grade



"The rule of law means different things to different people, but to me, it means there are boundaries that people cannot overstep, and if they do, they will face the consequences of their actions. Laws are not meant to restrict, they are meant to protect us and make us safer. Without law there would be no order and no rules. No one is above the law, as the laws apply to everyone. I think laws are important to keep us safe and help us."



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What does the rule of law mean to you?

Middle School Winners

1st place: Caroline Rhodes, 7th grade



"The rule of law represents a set of rules people follow to maintain order instead of chaos. It states that laws are enforced equally and impartially, meaning they are applied to everyone regardless of status. Likewise, no one is above the law, and everyone is required to obey. This prevents individuals from acting unlawfully and keeps citizens in line based on the law. Last, laws are made and enforced according to established procedures, not the ruler's whim. The rule of law serves to not only create order but to protect our country from crime, bad leadership, and favoritism among citizens."

2nd place: Anthony Fiore, 8th grade

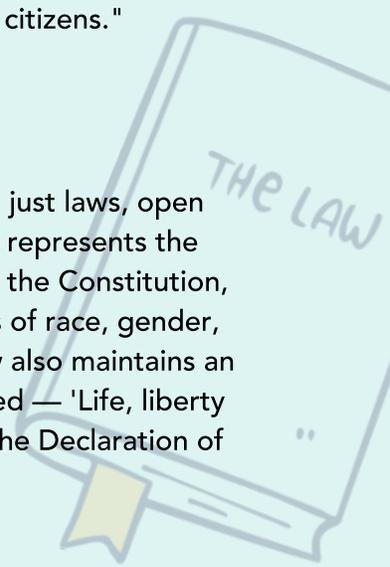


"The rule of law is defined as accountability under the law, just laws, open government and accessible justice. It not only governs but represents the values and beliefs of our society. Our laws are based upon the Constitution, which describes the rights that every American, regardless of race, gender, age, or creed, is guaranteed under the law. The rule of law also maintains an orderly society in which our unalienable rights are protected — 'Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' as our forefathers stated in the Declaration of Independence. This is what the rule of law means to me."

3rd place: Olivia Wasmund, 7th grade



"When King John of England signed the Magna Carta in the summer of 1215, the idea of rule of law was conceived. Rule of law signifies equality and fairness — meaning that no one, not even a king or president, is above the law. In democracies, it's expected that the rule of law be upheld. This promise to protect the rights of citizens is priceless. As an American living abroad in Asia, I find myself surrounded by countries where the rule of law doesn't exist. Yet, today the world is more aware than ever of the importance of this principle."



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What does the rule of law mean to you?

High School 1st Place Winner



Ashley Lin, 12th grade

"My immigrant father set foot on American soil with a suitcase in one hand and a few hundred dollars in the other. His pockets were empty, but his heart was filled with hope and possibility—he'd come to claim his right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It was the allure of the American Dream that drew him to this nation, to this land where even a man with nothing could find his way to everything.

The Anatomy of the American Dream:

1. **Freedom:** a privilege upon which any of it is possible at all. And the law, simultaneously arbitrary and specific and everywhere and nowhere—it shines at the center, guiding this fundamental American ideal. How ironic is it that what restricts the people also sets them free? Having been born into censorship and raised on disinformation, my father made it his goal to have his daughter come of age to a nation that offers all facets of the truth. I grew up, protected and powerful. Curiosity about anything was satisfied with openly-accessible knowledge. From a young age, I had the audacity to ask questions, however uncomfortable, and to hold my own opinions, whether correct or incorrect—all things my father never had the right to. In the United States, the rule of law offers me perspective, grants me choice, and promises me freedom.

2. **Order:** the structural integrity of our nation. Intellectual safety was not the only thing guaranteed to me; I grew to appreciate the comfort of my suburban city. At home and at school, I felt safe, not just from other people, but also from being taken advantage of by an unfair system. For me, the rule of law ensures security and justice. For me, the rule of law ensures that my education prepares me for life's adventures, that my healthcare provides me with adequate support, that my economy works towards building job opportunities rather than destroying them. The law is interwoven into daily American life in all shapes and forms; it creates the infrastructure for our carefully developed democracy.

3. **Equality:** one species, one nation, one set of rights—the United States guarantees it. As an Asian American female, my identity has never limited me because in America I can celebrate every part of myself, entirely and unashamedly, and still find embrace in society's arms. The rule of the law preaches the respect that every member of our community deserves, and from it I have adopted the holistic perspective that each story is a critical integrant in the design of our nation's uniquely diverse mosaic. Beneath the variance of skin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and ability, we are one people—united by a shared language of hope and equality. And so my father knew, as I now know: his chances of success lay at the mercy of the law, for it was the law that enabled the freedom, the order, the equality that fueled his beloved American Dream in the first place."

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What does the rule of law mean to you?

High School 2nd Place Winner

Katie Nguyen, 12th grade



"To me, the rule of law means that every individual—no matter their race, gender, age, religion, or sexuality—should be treated equally under our country's judicial system. Subsequently, this means that everyone is entitled to the same fundamental rights, such as freedom of speech, and legal processes, such as trial by an impartial jury. Personally, as an Asian-American woman, I find it essential that the courts maintain their integrity when it comes to grievances voiced by minorities. It is important that judges and juries listen to all perspectives of a case, rather than rushing to make decisions that might be influenced by bias.

The rule of law conveys to the American government the responsibility of being an active participant in international human rights organizations, suggesting that we should be diligent in promoting social progress and developing better living standards. In a time when our political climate is becoming increasingly divided, and citizens themselves are speaking up more than ever, it is important that the judicial system does not also remain silent and complicit. By analyzing each side of pertinent issues, the courts have the power to define and enforce laws where everyone is treated and enforced equally under them. Through this theory of judicial activism, the courts can consider the broader societal implications of their decisions and make meaningful changes to policy.

Though it may seem like such activism ends up silencing a side, in reality, following the rule of law ensures a fair and just nation at the end of the day. Courses of action may be taken that end up leaning toward one group's beliefs; however, the process to get there should be fair to all sides involved, according to the rule of law.

At my high school, I have been a part of the mock trial club for the past three years, which has provided me insight into a microcosm of law terminology, public speaking, and the inner workings of the judiciary. Having the privilege to personally speak to judges and attorneys has allowed me to admire how dedicated countless people in our judicial system are to maintaining the rule of law, protecting fundamental rights of security, property, and speech. My experience in the club continually reminds me of how important it is for those outside the judiciary to also advocate for the rule of law.

Despite being ordinary civilians, we can uphold the rule of law every day by respecting regulations like traffic rules, or staying informed about our government and country's history. Both civilians and the courts share the responsibility of supporting the rule of law to promote justice. To me, the rule of law is necessary in order to have an accountable government that listens to all of its citizens, as well as citizens that respect their government's policies. The just and orderly society that arises from the rule of law is a society that is truly free."

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What does the rule of law mean to you?

High School 3rd Place Winner

Chaim Moore, 12th grade



"Two years ago, I moved down south to Georgia. Coming from the flat Midwest, the first change that stood out was the scenery. The hills and the rolling trees carried on endlessly for miles and miles, with the sky stroked with orange and purple colors in the evenings, and a quaint environment surrounding my new home. So pulling into my new house, I was surprised to find a gigantic plant sticking out of the front yard. Walking up to it, my twin and I were astonished to find that it was a small tree, probably a few years old at this point. With few leaves and diminutive stature, it was meager next to the massive pines all around us.

Certainly, the same sentiment surrounded the young United States of America. There were few accomplishments the young state could claim as its own. Its citizens won independence in the Revolution, yet for centuries its British colonizers aided its development. They even based their legal system on common law from the empire across the pond. The legal tradition of the United States on the world stage was a small tree at best, irrelevant and dependent, that probably looked more like a big plant. But in 1787, the Founding Fathers decided to give their tree a root, the Constitution, and declared it the supreme law of the land. Soon enough, the world thought, this new tree would die off. It was untried in Europe, merely another experiment from the New World. Slowly the tree grew, rooted in the idea that justice was blind and applied equally to all. Our tree has scars. The burns of 1941 and 1968, the knots of 1861, the broken branches of Jim Crow and Watergate are all displayed on our tree.

Yet they are displayed proudly, proof that our rule of law can withstand division, overcome racism and corruption, and become the symbol of freedom and equality. It is proof that we can weather the storm and come out even stronger. Today, our tree is blossoming. It is the envy of all nations. Our tree has borne the fruit of expanded voting suffrage, enhanced trade, access to education, a transparent government, and fair trials for all citizens, each rooted in the Constitution and the rule of law. It makes me proud to see how our tree has become the stately pillar for the world to follow.

Yet the tree is surrounded by perils. More than ever, the threats of misinformation, division, and abuse of our legal system must be fended off. There is still injustice plaguing our nation that cannot be ignored. Throughout history, our tree made it through the trials and crises because people were willing to stand up for it. We must be vigilant in tending to our tree. It is a challenge worth undertaking, for if it were not, surely our tree would already have died. Yet the tree, though once small, still stands tall. And it is up to us to defend it."

