

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview:

Horseback Justice (15-20 minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS/KEY

Goal

Students experience the difference between a local judge who knows the people and circumstances of a community, and distant lawmakers creating one-size-fits-all statutory laws. Students evaluate which system is more likely to produce justice.

Instructions

1. Divide students into groups of 3–5.
2. Tell students that for each setup, their group must create ONE nationwide law that applies everywhere. Then they must reconsider each case as a local circuit riding judge who personally knows the territory and people.
3. Give groups 10-12 minutes to finish the cases, and then have volunteers share their decisions to the class.

Scenarios

Note: Answers will vary, but students should notice that (a) local judges often understand circumstances better, (b) justice sometimes requires flexibility, and (c) national laws can become overly broad and disconnected from real life.

1. **Scenario 1: The Winter Woodcutter** – A poor family cuts wood from a wealthy landowner’s forest during a brutal winter without permission. The family says they would have frozen without it.
2. **Scenario 2: The Broken Fence** – Two neighboring farmers argue after cattle break through a damaged fence and destroy crops. Both claim the other should have repaired it.
3. **Scenario 3: The Loud Festival** – A town holds a yearly celebration with music late into the night. New residents complain and demand a national “noise law” banning it.
4. **Challenge Round:** Read these scenarios quickly and ask volunteers this: “Is this situation better handled by local judges or national lawmakers?”
 - A dispute over local fishing traditions
 - Counterfeiting money
 - Foreign spies entering the country
 - A disagreement over property boundaries
 - Interstate highway safety rules
 - Piracy on the ocean

Wrap-Up/Final Direction

Ask students:

- Why might local judges understand justice better in some situations?
- What dangers come from lawmakers far away making rules for everyone?
- Can local judges also become unfair or biased?

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For each situation, your group must create ONE nationwide law that applies everywhere. Then they must reconsider the same case as a local circuit rider who personally knows the territory and people.

Scenario 1: The Winter Woodcutter – A poor family cuts wood from a wealthy landowner’s forest during a brutal winter without permission. The family says they would have frozen without it.

Round 1 – As national lawmakers, create ONE law that applies to the entire country. Your law:

Round 2 – Now imagine you are a judge who personally knows the family, the landowner, the area’s harsh winters, and the local customs. What would be the fairest outcome?

Scenario 2: The Broken Fence – Two neighboring farmers argue after cattle break through a damaged fence and destroy crops. Both claim the other should have repaired it.

Round 1 – As national lawmakers, create ONE law that applies to the entire country. Your law:

Round 2 – Now imagine you know both the families, how the fence has caused problems before, and that one farmer recently became sick and unable to repair it. What would be the fairest decision?

Scenario 3: The Loud Festival – A town holds a yearly celebration with music late into the night. New residents complain and demand a national “noise law” banning it.

Round 1 – As national lawmakers, create ONE law that applies to the entire country. Your law:

Round 2 – Now imagine that the celebration has existed for 80 years, it only happens once each year, and most townspeople support it. What would be the fairest solution?

