



Writing About Justice Lesson Plan

Sponsored by the Supreme Court Historical Society

Topic:

Exploring Justice Through Creative Writing

Materials Needed:

- Writing materials
- Internet access

KUD Objectives:

By participating in this lesson, students will:

- **Know** what justice is and how it is defined—colloquially and governmentally—in their country and abroad.
- **Understand** that global citizens can shape justice, and that writing is a tool for change.
- **Be able to** write a piece of creative writing for WtW's competition sponsored by the Supreme Court Historical Society, about the theme of justice.

Duration:

90 minutes

Grade Level(s):

8-12

Outline:

1. Define & Describe
2. Compare & Contrast
3. Take a Stand
4. Write
5. Share
6. Prepare

Standards:

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts:

The following lesson aligns with these standard codes across grades 6-12:

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.10](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1](#)

1. Define & Describe - 15 minutes

Begin class with a **five-minute guided freewrite**; ask students to keep their pencil moving or fingers typing, documenting their free-flowing thoughts in response to the following prompts:

- ***“How do you define the terms “justice” and “injustice”?”***
- ***Why do you define these terms/concepts in these ways?***
- ***What knowledge or life experiences inform your definitions?***

You might create a welcoming environment by streaming “writing music” (instrumental, lofi, etc.) in the background. Be sure to project the prompts on the screen/board so students can refer back to them while writing independently.

When the timer is up, ask students to **popcorn share**—each student calling on a peer—a summary of their definitions and reasonings. Then, in a **whole group discussion**, ask students to **identify similarities and differences** between their definitions and examples as you take notes on the board. If your class partook in the “**Image Inquiry**” activity detailed in this [Write the World justice writing blog post](#), you might move students from informational to conceptual thinking now, harkening back to their images of justice and probing:

“What are the differences between justice and law? How about justice and equity? Justice and social change? How do we know?”

(If you haven’t yet engaged in the Image Inquiry activity, this is an opportunity to do so, if class time allows).

2. Compare & Contrast - 20 minutes

Once students have explored similarities and differences between their definitions of “justice,” expand their perspectives through global analysis.

In a small group **jigsaw activity**, ask students to identify a time keeper, presenter, and notetaker. Then assign one type of governmental system/structure to each group: **democratic, laissez faire, and autocratic**. Ask them to identify one real-world example of their assigned structure using approved online research methods (e.g. library databases, internet search, etc.). Each group will be responsible for educating the rest of the class on how this governmental system tends to define and enforce **justice**.

As they prepare, they should take notes in response to the following questions:

- *What are the defining characteristics of this governmental structure, and how do you know?*
- *What is one real-world example of this government system, and how are public citizens treated under this system?*
- *How is justice defined in this system, and how do you know? How does this definition differ from your own (or, our class's) definition?*
- *How is justice enforced in this system?*
- *What examples of social or structural change—indeed, another form of justice—can you find in this governmental system?*

After a 10 minute rapid-fire research session, invite students to share their (likely nascent) findings with the class. ***Be mindful to discourage any evaluative judgements—such as a student positioning one system as “better” or “worse” than another—to maintain cultural responsiveness in this comparative analysis activity; the objective is to collect information about different systems and structures, and to widen students’ perspectives of justice beyond their own.***

3. Draw & Determine - 10 minutes

Once students have defined, compared, and analyzed justice in a global context, invite them to **reflect on their own positioning and geography**. Introduce them [to this concentric circle diagram](#) (drawn from psychologist Eurie Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Systems Theory of Development), and ask them consider the many spheres of influence, and many levels of community, that influence each individual—from the “microsystem” of home and school, to the “macrosystem” of law, policy, and the economy. What does justice look like at each level? You might wish to provide some direct instruction, here, about each level of the diagram, providing several examples to help students grasp each concept (e.g. “justice” in the microsystem might look like a dress code or student jury trial, while justice in the macrosystem might look like a free and fair election).

Next, ask students to complete a blank concentric circle worksheet (with help text/labels at each level), or, for a more advanced and multimodal challenge, to draw their own. They should make notes about what (in)justice means or looks like, for them, in each system—labeling every circle with representative words, images, or vignettes to show their thinking. Invite them to return to their freewriting for ideas or inspiration.

If class time allows, you might facilitate a **Gallery Walk** in which students observe and reflect on similarities/differences between their diagrams. If time is tight, elicit a few volunteers to share what this activity inspired them to **think about or wonder**, and why.

4. Write - 15 minutes

Next, with many versions of justice on their minds, position students to prepare for Write the World's writing competition. This competition invites students to choose a creative writing genre—fiction, poetry, song, playwriting—through which to explore themes of justice. To get them started, introduce a rapid-fire writing activity; restart your writing music, and ask students to keep their pencils moving or fingers typing in response to the following writing sprints:

- 1. Five-minute sprint — identifying a central message:** *Based on the brainstorming, drawing, and analytic work you've just engaged in—learning more about the many definitions of justice in our local, national, and global communities—what stands out to you most, and why? What makes you feel strongly—whether that feeling be anger, pride, hope, grief, longing, or something else entirely? Write about your feelings and reactions, and then, zoom in on the following question: **What message do you most hope to communicate to others about justice or injustice and why?***
- 2. Five-minute sprint — brainstorming mentor models:** *From *The Handmaid's Tale* (which shows a totalitarian government) to *To Kill a Mockingbird* (which shows racism playing out in a democratic court system), there are many literary examples of justice and injustice. The same goes for film. In a bulleted list or free-flowing reflection, write about examples of justice or injustice you have seen in creative writing or media. Once you've generated several examples, consider which stood out to you most (and least), and why.*
- 3. Five-minute sprint — plot mapping:** *Return to the central message you'd most like to communicate to others about justice (written in response to prompt #1). Now, plan for your own creative work: a poem, short play, song, sci-fi story, or other creative format. Brainstorm about how your characters, conflict, setting, action, dialogue, and other genre-specific craft techniques (such as use of soliloquy in a play or enjambment in a sonnet) will serve this main message of your work.*

5. Share - 20 minutes

Invite students to take a quick stretch break or walk around the room after their 15-minute writing sprint. Then, ask them to return to their seats and popcorn share about their writing.

Specifically, invite them to **share with the group which genre they plan to explore, and how that genre (and its techniques) will specifically communicate their main message.** Encourage your writers to take notes if peers' ideas spark new thoughts of their own. Name any connections you notice to your course curricula, such as to a legislative unit in social studies or a text study in English Language Arts.

6. Prepare - 10 minutes

For the final ten minutes of class, ensure students are registered on the Write the World website and able to log into their accounts to access the competition; remind them that they can click on the competition prompt to start writing and can work on their drafts directly in the text box on the website.

Ask them to complete these steps before leaving class, so that you can field any questions. If time allows, invite them to begin outlining a first draft of their submission on the website, saving their draft using the “Save” button as they go.

Finally, assign a competition entry as students’ homework assignment—optionally including a round of peer and teacher feedback on a rough draft in advance of final submission. Competition peer reviews on the Write the World site are eligible for cash prizes, and the first 100 entrants are eligible to receive a free Expert Review—a rubric-based feedback report from a professional author or educator.

We invite you to use any or all of the activities above to scaffold students’ understanding of justice in preparation for [Write the World’s October competition](#). If you’ve done so, we’d love to hear from you! Reach out to educators@writetheworld.org to share how it went, ask any questions about the activities, or to celebrate with snapshots of student work—you might even be featured on our blog or social media channels!



Thank you to the **Supreme Court Historical Society** for making this resource possible. The Supreme Court Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization dedicated to preserving and collecting the history of the United States Supreme Court, increasing public awareness of the Court's contribution to the constitutional heritage of the United States, and acquiring knowledge covering the history of the entire Judicial Branch. Learn more at supremecourthistory.org and explore resources at civics.supremecourthistory.org.

JUSTICE

WRITING COMPETITION

FREE TO ENTER OPEN TO AGES 13-19 CASH PRIZES EXPERT REVIEWS

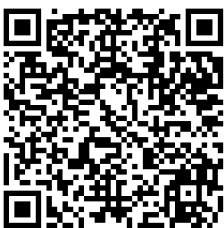
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