

WHAT MAKES A GOOD JUDGE?

This activity can be used with students learning about the right to a fair trial and the rule of law. Through this activity students will evaluate the characteristics of a fair and just judge.

This activity has been adapted from *The Rule of Law for Citizenship: Understanding Justice* resource pack published by the Bingham Centre For The Rule of Law.

Teaching notes

Look through the suggested words with students and check that they understand the meaning of all the words. Higher ability students may not need the suggested words.

When you ask students to discuss and feed back their answers, ensure that they examine how each characteristic relates to fairness and justice.

The main relevant characteristics listed that would ensure access to justice are: impartiality, independence, rationality, fairness, reasonableness, and having a good knowledge of the law.

As students feed back their answers to the class about why they chose their three characteristics, try to draw out the following:

Independence: a judge should be appointed independently and should be free from influence from the other branches of government or any other influence. A judge should not feel any pressure to decide a case in a particular way.

Impartiality: a judge should not be connected to any party or person involved in the dispute and they should treat every person before them equally. A judge should always be neutral and apply the rules of the court and the law fairly.

Knowledge of the law: judges should consider the facts of the case and apply the law to make a fair and just decision in the case before them. To do this fairly, they must have expert knowledge of what laws are relevant to the case and apply them consistently.

Reasonableness: a judge should be able to come to a decision that is not unreasonable. They should be rational and of sound mind.

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The role of the judge is very important as the decision-maker in court. Judges are responsible for ensuring that everyone who comes to court is given a fair trial.

Judges should have certain characteristics to ensure that trials are fair. By characteristics, we mean the judge's knowledge, attributes, and behaviour.

Imagine you are helping select judges for an important trial. What characteristics do you think would be important for the judge to have, in order for you to have confidence that justice was being done?

Choose three characteristics for your judge from the following suggestions. You can add more of your own if you wish.



impartial

clever

friendly

strict

independent

rational

fair

rich

compassionate

have strong opinions

reasonable

kind

have a good knowledge of the law

powerful

Explain why you chose your three characteristics. How do they relate to fairness and justice?