DISCOVERING JUSTICE

CHILDREN DISCOVERING JUSTICE

An Elementary and Middle School Curriculum

Teaching History, Social Studies, and Civic Values through Literacy

— Second Edition —
Children Discovering Justice (CDJ) is a literacy-based social studies and civics curriculum for kindergarten through eighth grade, published by Discovering Justice. Through this interdisciplinary curriculum, students learn academic content while reading, writing, speaking and listening about community engagement, rules, government, democracy, tolerance, rights, and responsibilities.

Children Discovering Justice empowers children to see issues from different viewpoints, stand up for their beliefs, resolve differences in constructive ways, and effectively participate in groups. As students embody the ideas of Children Discovering Justice, they work together to build stronger school communities and come to understand their role in constructive civic engagement.

The Children Discovering Justice curriculum:
- Aligns with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for History and Social Science.
- Maximizes instructional time.
- Incorporates research-based best practices of literacy instruction.
- Uses high-quality children’s literature to teach social studies concepts and skills.
- Promotes a positive school culture.
- Emphasizes critical thinking and problem solving.
- Provides opportunities for debate, voting, community service learning, hands-on projects, and interactive mock trials.
The kindergarten curriculum, *It Begins With You*, introduces students to *Children Discovering Justice*. Students explore the meaning of community and the role of good citizens within a community—beginning in their school and homes, then by looking at their own neighborhoods and thinking about neighborhoods around the world. By presenting models of empathy and fairness from history and fiction, the curriculum’s primary focus is for students to reflect upon their role in creating and maintaining safe, caring, and inclusive communities.

“CDJ is relevant to a first grader’s reality. Students have been able to take the concepts presented and mesh them with real life examples. The refreshing approach of CDJ demands active thinking and questioning. Students begin to see themselves as part of the world and that they, too, can make a difference.”

—Consuelo J. Ryan, First Grade Teacher
William E. Russell School, Dorchester

The first grade curriculum, *What is a Rule?*, explores the values that underpin rules and clarifies the difference between social conventions and rules. The curriculum introduces the idea that there are different rules for different places and situations. Students are introduced to individuals who challenged and changed our country’s laws. The curriculum utilizes children’s innate concerns for fairness and justice as a springboard to exploring how our government and justice system have responded to different times in United States history.
The third grade curriculum, *Rights and Responsibilities*, begins by examining the rights and responsibilities that enable us to live together in groups. The curriculum helps students see the desire for rights as a common theme in the colonists’ struggles in pre-Revolutionary War Boston. Throughout the curriculum, students are challenged to determine what they believe, to think about what constitutes freedom, and to explore the rights and responsibilities promised by our government.

The second grade curriculum, *Justice for All*, guides students in developing a personal understanding of justice and its place in society. The curriculum enables students to connect their own concerns for fairness with our country’s promise of equality. When you ask children to explain what is fair, they often state “When everything is equal.” Through the curriculum, young students investigate and comprehend times when fair is not exactly the same for each individual.

“This curriculum is packed with creative opportunities to integrate civics, history, and citizenship into our weekly reader’s and writer’s workshops. I love the fact that it is standards-based and allows students to use multiple learning styles. Discovering Justice has an impact on my students that is long-lasting and powerful beyond our understanding. I look forward to continuing to use this program for years to come.”

—Craig Martin, Third Grade Teacher
Higginson-Lewis K-8 School, Roxbury
The fourth grade curriculum, *Out of Many, One*, focuses on immigration to the United States. The curriculum helps students develop an understanding of why people move, how they form communities, and the impact of geography on people’s lives. Students study the geographic regions of the United States, and, through learning about Native American peoples who lived in each region, students examine how geographic factors impact the customs, beliefs, and habits of different communities.

The fifth grade curriculum, *Solving Problems: The United States Constitution*, examines the strategies that groups of people use to face challenges, resolve differences, and make decisions. The curriculum’s discussions about the United States Constitution—used as a case study of problem-solving—provide students with the perfect opportunity to explore problem-solving approaches and leadership styles, while learning about the conflicts that states faced in writing the Constitution and in trying to become a unified nation.

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—Nancy McGann, Fifth Grade Teacher
Wolfgang A. Mozart Elementary, Roslindale

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The sixth grade curriculum, Exploring Constitutional Rights Around the World, takes students on a journey to seven regions across the world outside of North America. Within each region, students explore government, history, geography, and culture in the following countries: Brazil, Cambodia, China, India, Iraq, South Africa, and Ukraine. Students compare portions of each country’s constitution that are similar to the First and Fourth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution. Through in-depth inquiry, students discover different rights that are not included in the U.S. Constitution and discuss, debate, and vote on whether these rights should be included as amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

“Children Discovering Justice is special—it is literacy-based, meaning that teachers can teach social studies without sacrificing essential literacy instruction. Rich texts and accompanying lessons foster deep exploration through which students learn critical skills and identify larger themes.”

—David Grenier, Sixth Grade Teacher

Henry J. Robinson Middle School, Lowell
The seventh grade curriculum, *Shaping History: Rules of the Ancient World*, introduces students to the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. While learning about the geography, religion, achievements, politics, economics, and social structures of each civilization, students come to understand how each of these elements helps to guide the creation, implementation, and evolution of rules in society. They evaluate the necessity and effectiveness of ancient rules and rule-makers and ultimately compare them to modern-day rules and their application in the United States today.
The eighth grade curriculum, A More Perfect Union: U.S. History 1763-1877, explores the ways in which democratic principles have guided the nation from its struggle to gain independence up through its attempts to reunify and recover from civil war. Students analyze primary sources, investigate events from multiple perspectives, simulate key moments from history, explore the roles of propaganda and technology during wartime, examine court cases and laws, and develop arguments based on careful consideration of historical evidence. They witness how the founding principle of a “self-evident” truth of equality has been the driving force behind the nation’s struggle to create “a more perfect union.”

The eighth grade curriculum provides fertile ground for students to draw parallels between social justice movements of the past and present, engaging and inviting them to create an even more just future.
THE CHILDREN DISCOVERING JUSTICE field trips take place in real courtrooms and engage students in 90-minute mock trial activities. Students are led on a tour of the Courthouse, which includes an in-depth introduction to the parts of the courtroom.

GRADE 1: Students participate in a mock trial about the alleged crimes of trespassing and vandalism using the narrative of Goldilocks and the Three Bears.

GRADE 2: The Teddy Bear Trial engages students in a mock civil trial to determine the rightful owners of a teddy bear left outside at recess.

GRADE 3: In The Colony of Massachusetts v. The British Soldiers, students learn about the Boston Massacre as well as John Adams’s role in it. Students then participate in an interactive mock trial to determine the guilt or innocence of the British soldiers.

GRADE 4: The Mock Immigration Hearing, based on the book When Jessie Came Across the Sea, takes students through a hearing about the immigration of Jessie’s grandmother.

GRADE 5: Students participate in a mock criminal trial about the theft of personal property in the case of Commonwealth v. Victor G.

GRADE 6: Students delve into the Bill of Rights, focusing on either the First or Fourth Amendment as they write and deliver oral arguments in landmark Supreme Court cases addressing the rights of students in public schools.

GRADE 7: Prior to their Courthouse visit, students analyze the facts of a juvenile criminal case and determine different outcomes of the case based on the legal codes of four ancient civilizations. At the Courthouse, students conduct a mock trial to determine the outcome of the same case based on a modern interpretation of the law.

KINDERGARTEN and GRADE 8 field trips are in development.

For more information or to schedule a field trip, please contact:
Johnny Sadoff, Program Associate
jsadoff@discoveringjustice.org or 617.748.9639
Join the schools in these communities which are currently using *Children Discovering Justice* in their classrooms:

- Belmont, MA
- Boston, MA
- Brookline, MA
- Cambridge, MA
- Canyon, CA
- Lawrence, MA
- Lowell, MA
- Milton, MA
- New Bedford, MA
- Watertown, MA
- Worcester, MA

“...after the field trip to [the Courthouse], my students are no longer allowed to tattle against each other after recess. The children now have to write down the ‘evidence’ in a note to the Principal or myself, and be prepared to present as a witness for the alleged offence about which they are tattling. The rest of the class acts as jury.”

— Jorgelina Abbate-Vaughn,
First Grade Teacher
Ellis Elementary School, Roxbury
HOW TO BRING CDJ TO YOUR STUDENTS

Please contact us to discuss a plan for your district or school. Many schools choose to enroll one or two grades in the first year and fully implement the *Children Discovering Justice* curriculum over several years. All plans are, however, individualized to meet your district’s or school’s goals.

For more information or to purchase materials, please contact:

Jan Shafer, Education Director
jshafer@discoveringjustice.org
617.748.4184

WHAT IS INCLUDED

Participating schools receive:

One curriculum guide and all corresponding trade books for each participating teacher;

5 hours of professional development training for teachers new to the program;

School site visits and ongoing support from Discovering Justice staff, including supplemental lessons and quarterly newsletters; and

An interactive, free courthouse field trip for a grade of your choice. Limit one grade per school. Transportation not included.
Discovering Justice is a nonprofit leader in civic education that prepares young people to value the justice system, realize the power of their own voices, and embrace civic responsibility by connecting classrooms and courtrooms.

Discovering Justice offers innovative in-school, afterschool, and courthouse field trip programs that teach elementary and middle school students about the justice system, the role of law in a democratic society, and the fundamental importance of good citizenship.

Discovering Justice
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