



Judges in the Classroom

Her Day in Court Women Judges and Justices in Washington State

Source:

Margaret Fisher at the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) originally authored the lesson on behalf of the Washington State Gender and Justice Commission. The lesson was updated in 2020, to accompany the YouTube video updated in 2011. For more information, contact AOC, Temple of Justice, 415 12th Ave SW, PO Box 41174, Olympia, WA 98504-1174. For an electronic copy of this lesson, or to view other lesson plans, visit Judges in the Classroom on the Washington Courts Web site at: www.courts.wa.gov/education/.

Description:

This lesson explores the history of women in the legal profession in Washington. Students learn about various ways women and women of color were discriminated against, and various coping strategies. Discussion following the YouTube video explores the examples found of discrimination in law school, finding lawyer positions, law firms and law schools, in front of judges, and the coping strategies of women to deal with the barriers presented. Students will reflect on what, if any, of these barriers still exist and what other groups might face similar barriers.

Grade Level:

Grades 9-12

Objectives:

At the end of this lesson, students will be better able to:

1. Identify barriers women faced historically in becoming lawyers and judges.
2. Consider what barriers women face today in employment.
3. Identify strategies women use to become successful.
4. Reflect on what other groups may face discrimination in the law field.

Time:

One class period (approximately 50 minutes).

Materials:

- *Her Day in Court* video (42.5 min.) available from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBYG_rPUk8U&t=7s.
- One copy of Handout 1 (*Her Day in Court*) for each student.

Procedures:

1. Begin by asking the class if anyone can give the name of a lawyer or judge from either Washington State or from anywhere in the country. Tell students not to include TV judges or lawyers. Give them a minute to think. Tell students that while it might have been hard to think of a name, today they are going to learn about the challenges faced by women in the law profession in the history of Washington.
2. Tell students before they watch this YouTube video of the history of women in the law in Washington, they are going to receive a handout to fill in examples that they notice while watching the video. Give each student a copy of Handout 1.
3. Show the YouTube video. You should stop the video at various points to discuss what students observe, for instance, after the law school section.
4. Ask students what were the various strategies that the women used to react to the difficulties. Write their responses on the board: had a sense of humor, persevered, got support from other women, developed political base, dressed to distinguish themselves from female support staff, and adopted a very feminine or shunned their feminine side.
5. After the YouTube video is over, ask students to reflect on whether any of these discrimination practices are still present today. Also ask them about what other groups might face the same type of discrimination as women did in the 1970s and 1980s.
6. The YouTube video ends with the quote that “A woman’s voice plus a man’s voice equals the human voice.” Do you agree? Would you rewrite this?
7. Thank the group for their efforts and encourage them to be aware of fairness and discrimination around them.

Handout 1

Her Day in Court

1. As you watch the YouTube video, write down instances of how women in the law profession experienced discrimination and ways that they responded.

	Discrimination practice	Responses
Student in Law School		
Looking for a Job		
Working in a Firm		
Dealing with Judges		
Teaching in a Law School		

Moving as a municipal court judge to the more powerful superior court judgeship		

2. Do you think these types of discrimination against women and women of color have ended?

3. What other groups experience this type of discrimination?