

## Lesson Overview

# YERTLE THE TURTLE



**Overview:** This lesson will educate students on laws and rights while teaching them the importance of the rule of law.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to...

- Explain the consequences of an absence of rules and laws.
- Identify the Constitution as the document which establishes the structure, function, powers, and limits of American government.

### Time Required:

- One hour

### Materials Needed:

- Copy of *Yertle the Turtle* by Dr. Seuss
- [Video of Yertle the Turtle](#) (available on YouTube)
- “Above or Below” pictures
- “LAW” poster
- U.S. Constitution Moon
- Handout A: Turtle coloring sheet and poem

## Learning about laws through Dr. Seuss

### Procedures

1. Begin the lesson by telling the class that they will be playing a game called “Above or Below”.
  - a. Groups of 3-4 students will receive pictures of six people – a president, a judge, a policeman, a parent, a child, and a celebrity. Students should cut out these pictures.
  - b. Post the paper with the word “LAW” on the wall at waist-height. Ask students what a law is. Discuss responses. Laws are rules made by government that people must follow to keep us safe and protect our rights.
  - c. Tell students that their group will need to decide if each person is above the law (not required to follow the law) or under the law (required to/must follow the law). They should then take turns posting that picture over or under the word “LAW” based on their response. Discuss why students place certain people in the places they chose.
2. Continue the lesson by reading Dr. Seuss’ book *Yertle the Turtle* to the class. If you do not have the book, the story is available on YouTube to view. [Click here for video of Yertle the Turtle](#).
3. Ask students what they think about King Yertle and discuss the responses. Below are some follow up questions.
  - a. Is he a nice king?
  - b. A mean king?
  - c. Is he fair?
  - d. Did he care about the other turtles?

## Next Generation Sunshine State Standards

SS.2.C.1.2 Explain the consequences of an absence of rules and laws.

SS.2.C.3.1 Identify the Constitution as the document which establishes the structure, function, powers, and limits of American government.

## Procedures, continued

4. Ask students what a “right” is. A right is a freedom of some kind. In the United States, we have the right to free speech, the right to choose or not choose a religion, the right to a jury, the right to go to school, and many other rights. Ask students what rights they can think of. Discuss responses. Ask students if they through the Mack and the turtles had any rights under King Yertle.
  - a. Discuss with students what happened when King Yertle did not have any restrictions, or limits, placed on his power. What happened to the other turtles? *The turtles did not have any rights and King Yertle was able to have complete power over them.*
5. Tell students that King Yertle thought there was nothing higher than him as a ruler. Explain that in the United States, we have laws and an important document called the **United States Constitution**. The United States Constitution is the **HIGHEST** law in the land and establishes the structure, function, powers, and limits of American government. Everyone must follow the laws and what is in the United States Constitution. This is known as the **rule of law**. The rule of law means that no one is above the law, not even people that we think are really important, like a president. Refer to the students’ responses from the activity earlier to reinforce the idea that no one is above the law. Allow students to move the people below the word law. Hold up the cut out of the moon. Explain that in the story, the moon represents the law – something that was higher than King Yertle.
6. Have a student read the poem aloud on Handout A. Tell students they will need to name and color their turtle to represent their personality. Students will then need to name rights they have by putting them on the turtle’s shell in the different shapes.
7. Post the moon on the wall. Have students tape/hang their turtles under the moon as a reminder that all people, and turtles, must follow the law and that no one is above the law.
  - a. Another option for reinforcing this idea is to hang a yard stick or ruler over the door to the classroom as a reminded of the “rule” of law.



**President**



**Police**



**Parents**



**Movie Star**



**Judge**



**Child**

**LAW**



**Each individual has rights that they need,**

**Even turtles standing no higher than a weed.**

**Color your turtle, give it personality and flare,**

**And a name that a turtle would be proud to bear.**

**Fill in its rights on its little turtle shell,**

**So all who see the turtle will know its rights well.**

