

Santa Claus on Trial

A Mock Trial & Debate on Civil Liberties

Lesson Overview

In this satirical yet academically grounded lesson, students analyze a fictional lawsuit filed against Santa Claus alleging violations of children's civil liberties. The scenario provides a creative framework for examining real constitutional principles such as privacy rights, surveillance, free expression, government authority, and taxation. Students work collaboratively to research legal concepts, construct arguments, and participate in a debate or mock trial.

This lesson is ideal as a **high-engagement activity**, particularly before winter break, while still reinforcing essential civics skills.

Grade Level

Grades 7–10 (easily adaptable for higher grades)

Time Required

1–2 class periods (45–90 minutes)

Subject Areas

Civics, Government, Social Studies, Law

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify and explain constitutional rights related to privacy and free expression
 - Analyze legal arguments and apply them to a fictional case
 - Conduct basic legal research using credible sources
 - Develop and defend an argument using evidence
 - Engage respectfully in debate or mock trial procedures
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Background Reading (Student Handout)

Santa Claus Lawsuit Raises Civil Liberties Questions

CHICAGO — The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) announced today that it has filed a lawsuit against Santa Claus, alleging multiple violations of children’s civil rights.

According to an ACLU spokesperson, Mr. E. Scrooge, Santa Claus has engaged in widespread surveillance of children by collecting personal information and storing it in a large database without consent. The ACLU claims this information is used by Santa’s organization to classify children as “naughty” or “nice,” a process the group argues violates children’s right to privacy.

“Mr. Claus has been monitoring children’s behavior and compiling detailed records without their knowledge or permission,” Mr. Scrooge stated. “This information is then used to reward or punish children, which we believe violates established civil rights protections.”

The lawsuit also alleges that Santa Claus has participated in psychological manipulation designed to restrict free expression and independent thought among children. As evidence, the ACLU submitted an internal document allegedly obtained from a worker in Santa’s distribution department. The document includes the following passage:

*He sees you when you are sleeping
He knows when you’re awake
He knows if you’ve been bad or good
So be good for goodness’ sake.*

According to the ACLU, this document suggests an intentional effort to influence children’s behavior through fear of constant surveillance. Concerns were also raised about what could happen if Santa’s database were accessed by other law enforcement agencies around the world.

Officials from the Department of Justice confirmed that they are reviewing the allegations and have begun investigating whether Santa Claus may be involved in broader violations of federal law. Anonymous sources suggested that parents, teachers, and religious leaders could be implicated, possibly testifying in exchange for reduced penalties.

In addition, the Department of Justice and the FBI are examining possible tax violations. Investigators noted that Santa delivers goods nationwide yet appears to pay no import duties or state and local taxes. Because Santa operates in all U.S. states, authorities argue he may be subject to taxation.

Santa Claus’s legal team strongly denied all allegations. In a prepared statement, Santa stated that the charges are “absurd” and that his actions are rooted in tradition and goodwill. He expressed confidence that the courts would dismiss the claims.

Legal experts remain uncertain how the lawsuit or possible criminal charges might affect Santa’s Christmas operations this year.

Instructional Procedure

Step 1: Introduction (10 minutes)

- Explain that this is a **fictional, satirical case** used to explore real constitutional issues
 - Review key concepts:
 - Right to privacy
 - Free expression
 - Due process
 - Government authority and taxation
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Step 2: Group Assignments (5 minutes)

Divide students into two groups:

Group 1 – Prosecution

- Build a legal case *against* Santa Claus
- Focus on privacy, surveillance, data collection, and civil liberties

Group 2 – Defense

- Defend Santa Claus
- Focus on intent, tradition, lack of government authority, and legal standing

(Optional: Assign judge, witnesses, attorneys, and jury roles for a mock trial.)

Step 3: Research & Preparation (20–30 minutes)

Students research:

- Constitutional rights involved
- Relevant legal principles or precedents
- Definitions of “government actor” and jurisdiction
- Arguments supporting their assigned side

Each group prepares:

- Opening statement
- At least three key arguments
- Supporting evidence

Step 4: Debate or Mock Trial (20–30 minutes)

Option A: Debate

- Opening statements
- Argument rounds
- Rebuttals
- Closing statements

Option B: Mock Trial

- Opening statements
- Witness testimony (optional/creative)
- Cross-examination
- Closing arguments
- Jury deliberation and verdict

Assessment Options

- Participation rubric (argument quality, collaboration, civility)
- Written reflection:
 - Which side presented the stronger legal argument and why?
- Exit ticket:
 - Which constitutional right was most central to this case?

Student Research Resources (Easy-to-Use URLs)

Civil Liberties & Constitution

- <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights>
- <https://www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution>
- <https://www.billofrightsinstitute.org>

Privacy & Surveillance

- <https://www EFF.org/issues/privacy>
- <https://www.aclu.org/issues/privacy-technology>

Mock Trial & Legal Basics

- <https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts>
- <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex>

Student-Friendly Civics

- <https://www.icivics.org>
 - <https://kids.laws.com>
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Teacher Notes

- Emphasize the **fictional nature** of the case
 - Encourage creativity while requiring evidence-based arguments
 - This lesson works especially well as a **pre-holiday engagement activity**
 - Can be shortened or extended based on class time and depth of research
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Optional Extensions

- Connect the case to modern data privacy issues
- Add a written legal brief assignment
- Compare Santa's surveillance to real-world government surveillance debates