YOUTH v GOV

AMERICA'S YOUTH TAKE ON THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL GOVERNMENT

SCREENING GUIDE
To the Teacher...

Many students, because they are still minors, feel as if they have little control over events in their lives. Parents, teachers, and administrators make the rules they must live by. Most cannot drive; they cannot vote. A film like YOUTH v. GOV, however, shows them that by working with others, they can have influence and perhaps eventually effect the change they seek.

In the lawsuit Juliana v. United States, 21 young people sued the federal government because of governmental actions that fostered the growth of fossil fuel industries and thus of carbon emissions; they were represented by lawyers from the non-profit Our Children’s Trust. By the time the lawsuit was filed in 2015, scientists were warning urgently of the potential for climate change disaster, and since then the nation has faced frequent hurricanes, record-setting wildfires, and extensive urban and rural flooding.

After the plaintiffs won in the lower federal court, the government appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, arguing that the plaintiffs lacked “standing” to bring suit. A three-judge panel ruled in the government’s favor in a 2-1 split decision. The plaintiffs have since filed for reconsideration by the full court.

In showing this film, you may have to clarify certain judicial terms for your students, such as plaintiff, defendant, original jurisdiction, appeals court, intervenors, and standing. A useful online resource for you for these terms is https://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/.

The first activity in this screening guide is a graphic organizers divided into quadrants. You should give this to students before showing the film, review what each quadrant means, and encourage them to fill the page with quick notes as they watch. You may wish to stop the film occasionally to give them some time to write down their observations, reactions, and questions. At the end of the film, give your students time to share their ideas in small groups and let them add any new ideas. Then have a whole-class discussion to help students express and clarify their reaction to the film.

The last page of this guide has a set of questions you could use either to structure discussion in class or to have students respond to in writing. Of these, the most important is the last question. It would be helpful if you familiarize yourself with local environmental issues and local efforts to prod the federal government and your own state and local governments to act on these concerns.

Empowering students to act can take many forms besides joining a lawsuit. Students can write letters to local newspapers, design podcasts, plan school activities to raise student awareness, lobby local lawmakers, and volunteer in political campaigns. Encourage your students to continue learning about these issues and then find a way to make their own voices heard.
# YOUTH v GOV

Response Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likes – What appealed to you in this film?</th>
<th>Dislikes – What didn’t you enjoy in this film?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Puzzles – What questions do you have after seeing this film?</th>
<th>Patterns – What elements (images or actions) keep reappearing in the film?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions for Discussion

1. Adults and young people joined efforts to bring the lawsuit known as *Juliana v. United States*. What did each group contribute to the effort? Could either group be successful without the other?

2. A *plaintiff* is someone who brings a lawsuit, who sues someone else in court. What were some of the environmental disasters that these plaintiffs had experienced? Have you had any experience yourself with extreme weather? Do you think it was caused by climate change?

3. The young plaintiffs won in the original court case. Why did they have to go to the appeals court? Who was their opposition in that court?

4. According to the film, what has been the track record of the U.S. government over the last 50 years as far as fossil fuel development and climate change? Why do you think this is so?

5. Establishing *standing* to sue requires that the plaintiff show
   
   a) that they suffered harm
   
   b) that the defendant caused the harm
   
   c) that the courts can provide a remedy.

   How did the young people and their attorneys try to show that they had standing on each of these points? What evidence did they provide? Where did they find the evidence?

6. The Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution protect present and future generations from government actions that harm life, liberty, and property without due process of law. The lawsuit claims that these rights are already being infringed by the harmful impacts of climate change. How is the case showing that the government has acted in a way to cause this harm?

7. What is the status of *Juliana v. United States* now? Do you think the young people will eventually prevail?

8. What do you think the young plaintiffs learned from this experience? How do they keep from getting discouraged?

9. As the film asks at the end, how are YOU holding your government accountable?
   
   • at the federal level?
   
   • at the state level?
   
   • at the local level?

   What groups in your area are working to protect the climate?

10. Does this film inspire you to fight for a cause? What other causes should young people support?