

Handout 1

No Weapons on School Property



Pacifica School District has adopted a "zero-tolerance" rule on weapons for the schools in their district. The school district is quite concerned about the safety of its students, especially in light of the recent tragic shootings in Littleton, Colorado, and other schools.

Nationally, more than 6000 students were expelled for bringing guns to school last year. Thirteen percent of students across the nation say they know a student who brings guns to school, according to a study by the United States Departments of Education and Justice. In a year, 1 in 12 high schoolers was threatened or injured with a weapon at school. Ten percent of all public schools reported at least one violent crime last school year.

At all entrances to the schools in Pacifica, the following sign is posted: **"Weapons of any kind are prohibited."** Additionally, the principal goes around to each classroom at the start of the school year and explains to students that no real or toy weapons can be brought to school or the student will be expelled from school for one year.

The law seems clear, but some disputes have arisen over the interpretation of the law. In each of the situations below, the principal expelled the student for violating the no weapons rule.

The school's definition of weapon is a real or toy instrument of combat, something with which to fight. You are a judge and parents and students have filed an appeal in your court. Decide how you would interpret the rule to determine whether the rule has been violated in each of the following cases. In situations where you decide the rule has been broken, decide if there is some important reason that should override the rule.

- a. Jeffrey brought a 1-inch plastic gun with no moving parts from his GI Joe. He says that he put the toy into his pants pocket and forgot he had it. Another student saw it when he was getting out his lunch money.

- b. Gabriel was learning about mysteries and solving clues at school. He brought his new game of "CLUE" to school, which had several small, 1-inch weapons, including a lead pipe, a revolver, and a knife.

- c. Jack showed several students a .38 caliber pistol in the trunk of his car. The car was parked in the school parking lot. The gun was in the car because the night before he and his mother ran some errands that included returning the gun to his older sister after it had been repaired. They never made it to his sister's house.

- d. Theo had been camping the weekend before and put his Swiss army knife on his key ring. He brought the key ring with the knife to school.

- e. Medea is a member of a religion that requires its members to carry a small knife, like a dagger. Medea brings his knife to school, carried in the traditional manner.

- f. Gang members have threatened to kill Henry because he has refused to join their gang. Henry brings a gun to school to protect himself against these gang members.

- g. Chin is studying Kung Fu and his class starts right after school gets out. He is learning to use the swords and brought his set of swords to school in his backpack.

- h. Jade is going to Sid's house after school for a water party, in which all the kids are supposed to bring their water guns. Jade brings his water gun to school in his backpack.