

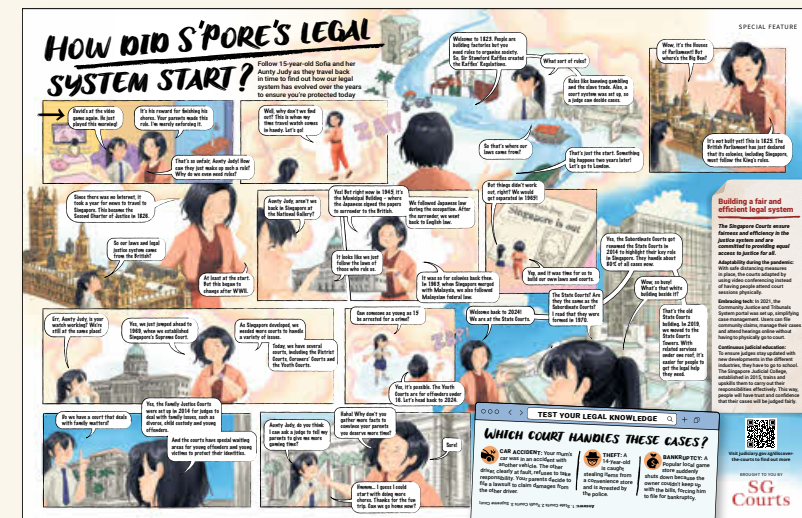
DISCOVER THE COURTS KNOW THE COURTS



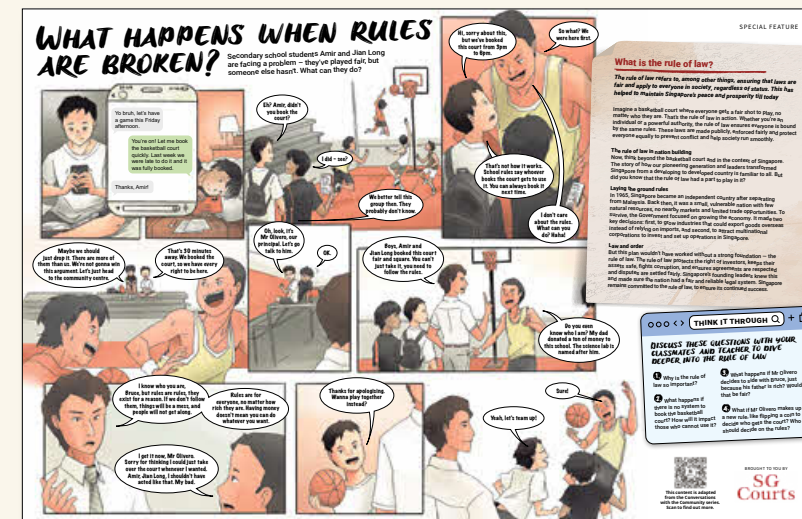
THE LAW, AND YOUR LIFE

You may have watched a scene on television or heard in the news that the courtroom is a place only for adults and criminals. But did you know that the law and the courts play a big part in everyone's daily life? From maintaining a safe society to helping businesses that are facing bankruptcy, this guide takes you through the legal system and the Singapore Courts in a way that's simple, clear and relevant. Whether you're curious about the role of the courts in Singapore, what happens in a courtroom or simply collecting factoids about the nation's legal system, this e-book has it all.

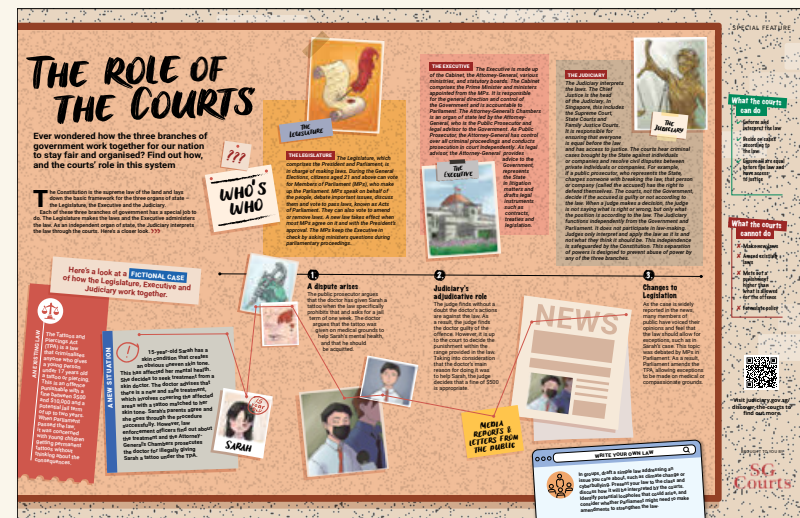
Inside, you will discover:



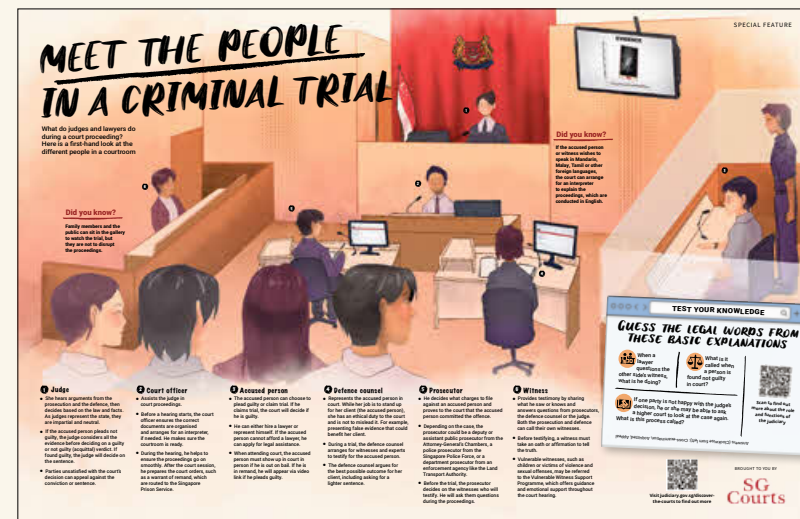
PAGE 3 How our legal system came about Join Sofia and her time-travelling Aunt Judy on a journey to discover why we need rules, as we mark the 200th anniversary of the Second Charter of Justice in 2026.



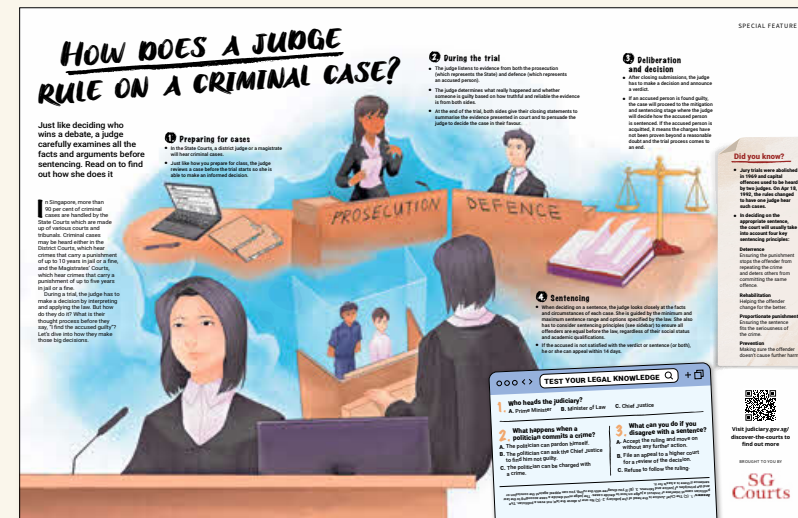
PAGE 7 The rule of law and its role in nation-building Why is it important for the law to apply to everyone? Join Amir and Jian Long as they face off a rule-breaker, and find out why rules exist for our collective benefit.



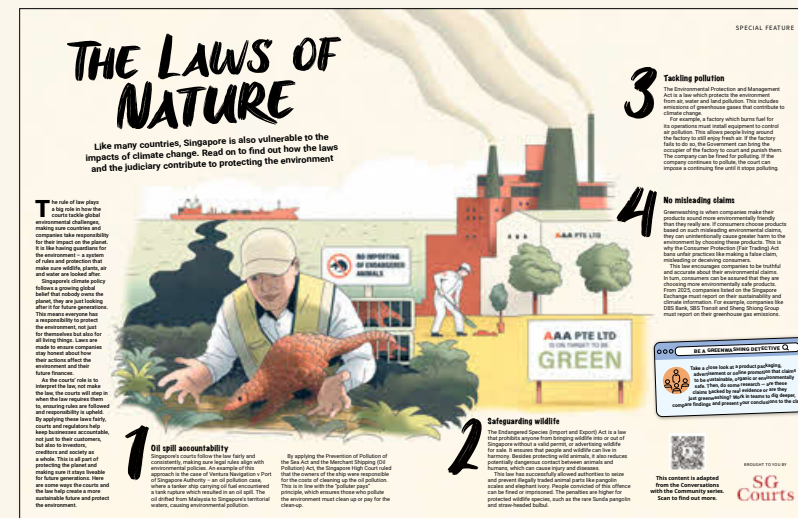
PAGE 5 Who creates, enforces and interprets our laws It's not just the courts. Find out how the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary work together to govern Singapore, and what makes the courts' role distinct.



PAGE 9 What happens in a criminal trial Not sure what a prosecutor or witness does during a court case? Here's an easy guide to the people you'll see in a courtroom and the main stages of a court trial.



PAGE 11 How judges make decisions Curious how judges decide if someone is guilty? This article walks you through a criminal trial and how a judge reaches a verdict and the appropriate sentence.



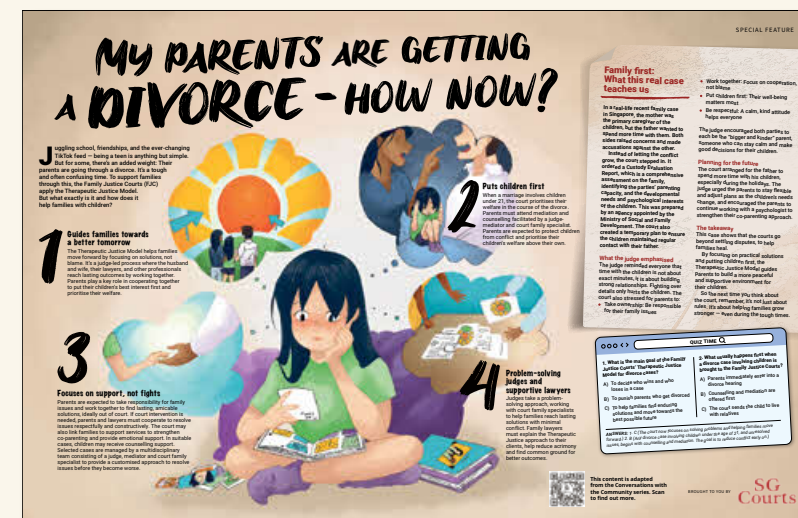
PAGE 15 What legal protection does the environment have The existential threat of our natural habitat requires laws to tackle air pollution and illegal wildlife trade. Here's how the laws and courts help to protect the environment.



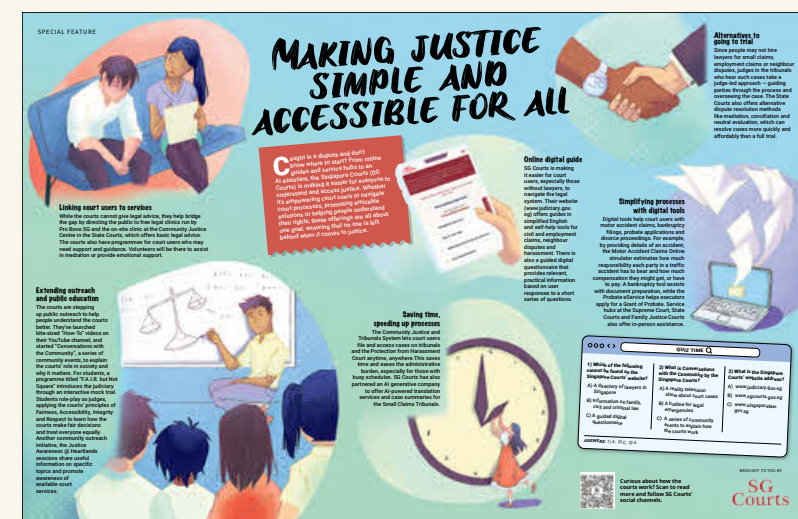
PAGE 19 Digital solutions to navigate the justice system Explore the various digital tools that can help you manage certain cases, access trustworthy legal information, and verify court orders efficiently.



PAGE 13 How the courts step in to help businesses in financial trouble When businesses struggle to survive, find out how the courts balance between saving the business and being fair to its creditors.



PAGE 17 How a Therapeutic Justice approach helps families going through divorce The Therapeutic Justice model aims to reduce conflict and guides families towards solutions that put children's interests first. Find out how.



PAGE 21 Making justice accessible to all Discover how people can navigate court processes, understand their legal rights and pursue amicable outcomes, ensuring no one is left behind in accessing justice.

HOW DID S'PORE'S LEGAL SYSTEM START?

Follow 15-year-old Sofia and her Aunt Judy as they travel back in time to find out how our legal system has evolved over the years to ensure you're protected today

1823: Welcome to 1823. People are building factories but you need rules to organise society. So, Sir Stamford Raffles created the Raffles' Regulations.

1825: Wow, it's the Houses of Parliament! But where's the Big Ben? It's not built yet! This is 1825. The British Parliament has just declared that its colonies, including Singapore, must follow the King's rules.

1826: Rules like banning gambling and the slave trade. Also, a court system was set up, so a judge can decide cases.

1826: What sort of rules?

1826: So that's where our laws came from?

1826: That's just the start. Something big happens two years later! Let's go to London.

1826: Since there was no Internet, it took a year for news to travel to Singapore. This became the Second Charter of Justice in 1826.

1826: So our laws and legal justice system came from the British?

1826: At least at the start. But this began to change after WWII.

1826: Well, why don't we find out? This is when my time travel watch comes in handy. Let's go!

1826: ZAP!

1826: Yes! But right now in 1826, it's the Municipal Building - where the Japanese signed the papers to surrender to the British.

1826: We followed Japanese law during the occupation. After the surrender, we went back to English law.

1826: It looks like we just follow the laws of those who rule us.

1826: It was so for colonies back then. In 1826, when Singapore merged with Malaysia, we also followed Malaysian federal law.

1826: Singapore is out

1826: Yes, the Subordinate Courts got renamed the State Courts in 2014 to highlight their key role in Singapore. They handle about 80% of all cases now.

1826: Yep, and it was time for us to build our own laws and courts.

1826: The State Courts? Are they the same as the Subordinate Courts? I read that they were formed in 1826.

1826: Wow, so busy! What's that white building beside it?

1826: That's the old State Courts building. In 1826, we moved to the State Courts Towers. With related services under one roof, it's easier for people to get the legal help they need.

1826: Welcome back to 2024! We are at the State Courts.

1826: Can someone as young as 15 be arrested for a crime?

1826: Yes, it's possible. The Youth Courts are for offenders under 16. Let's head back to 2024.

1826: ZAP!

1826: Err, Aunt Judy, is your watch working? We're still at the same place!

1826: Yes, we just jumped ahead to 1826, when we established Singapore's Supreme Court.

1826: As Singapore developed, we needed more courts to handle a variety of issues.

1826: Today, we have several courts, including the District Courts, Coroners' Courts and the Youth Courts.

1826: Yes, the Family Justice Courts were set up in 2014 for judges to deal with family issues, such as divorce, child custody and young offenders.

1826: And the courts have special waiting areas for young offenders and young victims to protect their identities.

1826: Do we have a court that deals with family matters?

1826: Aunt Judy, do you think I can ask a judge to tell my parents to give me more gaming time?

1826: Haha! Why don't you gather more facts to convince your parents you deserve more time?

1826: Sure!

1826: Hmm... I guess I could start with doing more chores. Thanks for the fun trip. Can we go home now?

1826: TEST YOUR LEGAL KNOWLEDGE

WHICH COURT HANDLES THESE CASES?

CAR ACCIDENT: Your mum's car was in an accident with another vehicle. The other driver, clearly at fault, refuses to take responsibility. Your parents decide to file a lawsuit to claim damages from the other driver.

THEFT: A 14-year-old is caught stealing items from a convenience store and is arrested by the police.

BANKRUPTCY: A popular local game store suddenly shuts down because the owner couldn't keep up with the bills, forcing him to file for bankruptcy.

Answers: 1. State Courts 2. Youth Courts 3. Supreme Court

Building a fair and efficient legal system

The Singapore Courts ensure fairness and efficiency in the justice system and are committed to providing equal access to justice for all.

Adaptability during the pandemic: With safe distancing measures in place, the courts adapted by using video conferencing instead of having people attend court sessions physically.

Embracing tech: In 2021, the Community Justice and Tribunals System portal was set up, simplifying case management. Users can file community claims, manage their cases and attend hearings online without having to physically go to court.

Continuous judicial education: To ensure judges stay updated with new developments in the different industries, they have to go to school. The Singapore Judicial College, established in 2015, trains and upskills them to carry out their responsibilities effectively. This way, people will have trust and confidence that their cases will be judged fairly.



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THE ROLE OF THE COURTS

Ever wondered how the three branches of government work together for our nation to stay fair and organised? Find out how, and the courts' role in this system

The Constitution is the supreme law of the land and lays down the basic framework for the three organs of state – the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. Each of these three branches of government has a special job to do. The Legislature makes the laws and the Executive administers the law. As an independent organ of state, the Judiciary interprets the law through the courts. Here's a closer look. >>>

THE LEGISLATURE

The Legislature, which comprises the President and Parliament, is in charge of making laws. During the General Elections, citizens aged 21 and above can vote for Members of Parliament (MPs), who make up the Parliament. MPs speak on behalf of the people, debate important issues, discuss them and vote to pass laws, known as Acts of Parliament. They can also vote to amend or remove laws. A new law takes effect when most MPs agree on it and with the President's approval. The MPs keep the Executive in check by asking ministers questions during parliamentary proceedings.

The Executive is made up of the Cabinet, the Attorney-General, various ministries, and statutory boards. The Cabinet comprises the Prime Minister and ministers appointed from the MPs. It is responsible for the general direction and control of the Government and is accountable to Parliament. The Attorney-General's Chambers is an organ of state led by the Attorney-General, who is the Public Prosecutor and legal advisor to the Government. As Public Prosecutor, the Attorney-General has control over all criminal proceedings and conducts prosecution in court independently. As legal advisor, the Attorney-General provides advice to the Government, represents the State in litigation matters and drafts legal instruments such as contracts, treaties and legislation.



THE EXECUTIVE

The Judiciary interprets the laws. The Chief Justice is the head of the Judiciary. In Singapore, this includes the Supreme Court, State Courts and Family Justice Courts. It is responsible for ensuring that everyone is equal before the law and has access to justice. The courts hear criminal cases brought by the State against individuals or companies and resolve civil disputes between private individuals or companies. For example, if a public prosecutor, who represents the State, charges someone with breaking the law, that person or company (called the accused) has the right to defend themselves. The courts, not the Government, decide if the accused is guilty or not according to the law. When a judge makes a decision, the judge is not saying what is right or wrong, but only what the position is according to the law. The Judiciary functions independently from the Government and Parliament. It does not participate in law-making. Judges only interpret and apply the law as it is and not what they think it should be. This independence is safeguarded by the Constitution. This separation of powers is designed to prevent abuse of power by any of the three branches.



THE JUDICIARY

What the courts can do

- ✓ Enforce and interpret the law
- ✓ Decide on cases according to the law
- ✓ Ensure all are equal before the law and have access to justice

What the courts cannot do

- ✗ Make new laws
- ✗ Amend existing laws
- ✗ Met out a punishment higher than what is allowed for the offence
- ✗ Formulate policy

Here's a look at a **FICTIONAL CASE** of how the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary work together.



AN EXISTING LAW

The Tattoos and Piercings Act (TPA) is a law that criminalises anyone who gives a young person under 17 years old a tattoo or piercing. This is an offence punishable with a fine between \$500 and \$10,000 and a potential jail term of up to two years. When Parliament passed the law, it was concerned with young children getting permanent tattoos without thinking about the consequences.

A NEW SITUATION

15-year-old Sarah has a skin condition that creates an obvious uneven skin tone. This has affected her mental health. She decides to seek treatment from a skin doctor. The doctor advises that there is a new and safe treatment, which involves covering the affected areas with a tattoo matched to her skin tone. Sarah's parents agree and she goes through the procedure successfully. However, law enforcement officers find out about the treatment and the Attorney-General's Chambers prosecutes the doctor for illegally giving Sarah a tattoo under the TPA.



15 year old

SARAH

1 A dispute arises

The public prosecutor argues that the doctor has given Sarah a tattoo when the law specifically prohibits that and asks for a jail term of one week. The doctor argues that the tattoo was given on medical grounds to help Sarah's mental health, and that he should be acquitted.

2 Judiciary's adjudicative role

The judge finds without a doubt the doctor's actions are against the law. As a result, the judge finds the doctor guilty of the offence. However, it is up to the court to decide the punishment within the range provided in the law. Taking into consideration that the doctor's main reason for doing it was to help Sarah, the judge decides that a fine of \$500 is appropriate.


3 Changes to Legislation

As the case is widely reported in the news, many members of public have voiced their opinions and feel that the law should allow for exceptions, such as in Sarah's case. This topic was debated by MPs in Parliament. As a result, Parliament amends the TPA, allowing exceptions to be made on medical or compassionate grounds.



MEDIA REPORTS & LETTERS FROM THE PUBLIC

WRITE YOUR OWN LAW



In groups, draft a simple law addressing an issue you care about, such as climate change or cyberbullying. Present your law to the class and discuss how it will be interpreted by the courts. Identify potential loopholes that could arise, and consider whether Parliament might need to make amendments to strengthen the law.

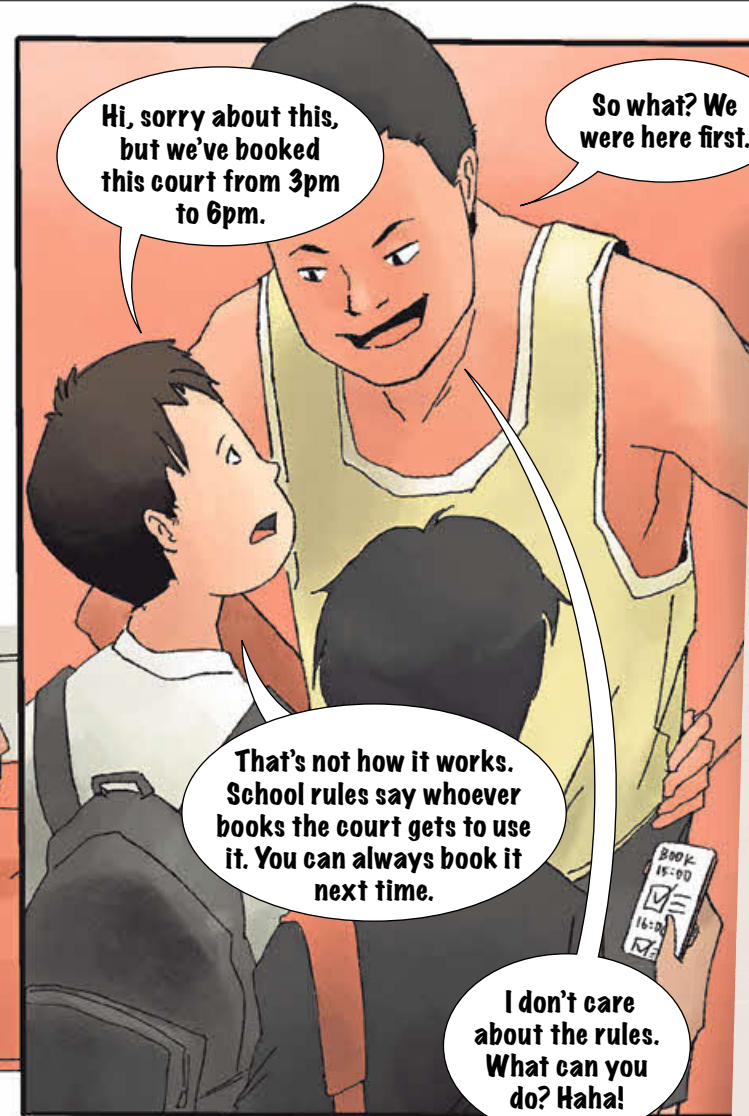


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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN RULES ARE BROKEN?

Secondary school students Amir and Jian Long are facing a problem – they've played fair, but someone else hasn't. What can they do?

SPECIAL FEATURE



What is the rule of law?

The rule of law refers to, among other things, ensuring that laws are fair and apply to everyone in society, regardless of status. This has helped to maintain Singapore's peace and prosperity till today

Imagine a basketball court where everyone gets a fair shot to play, no matter who they are. That's the rule of law in action. Whether you're an individual or a powerful authority, the rule of law ensures everyone is bound by the same rules. These laws are made publicly, enforced fairly and protect everyone equally to prevent conflict and help society run smoothly.

The rule of law in nation building

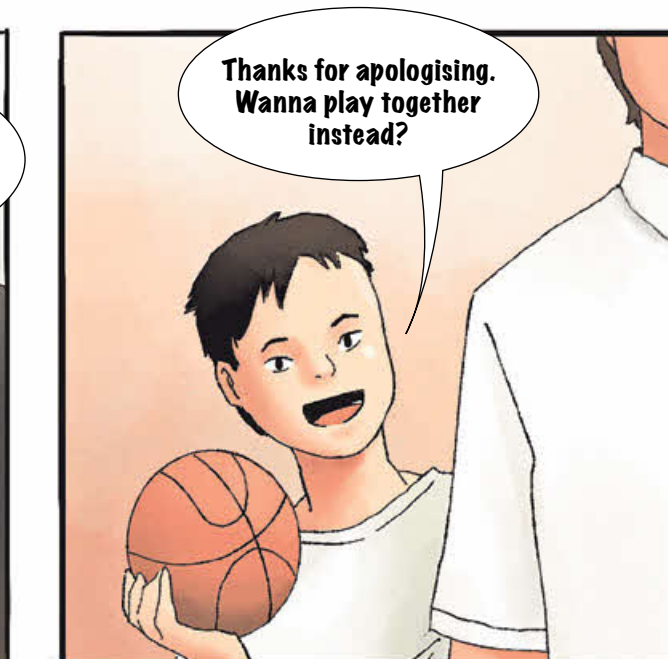
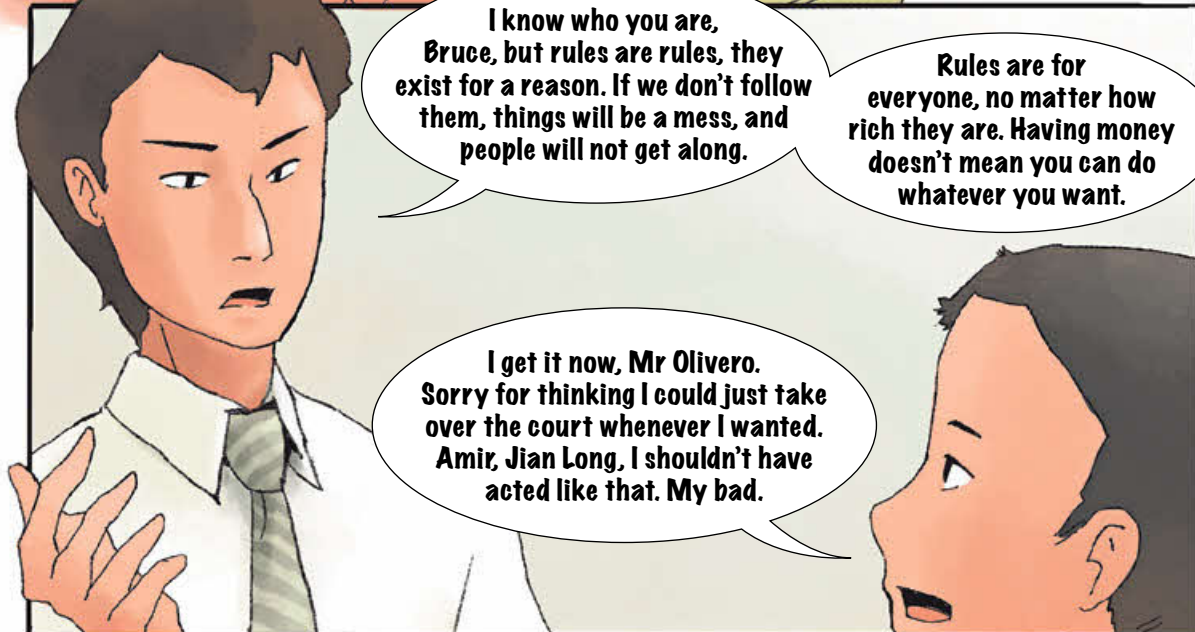
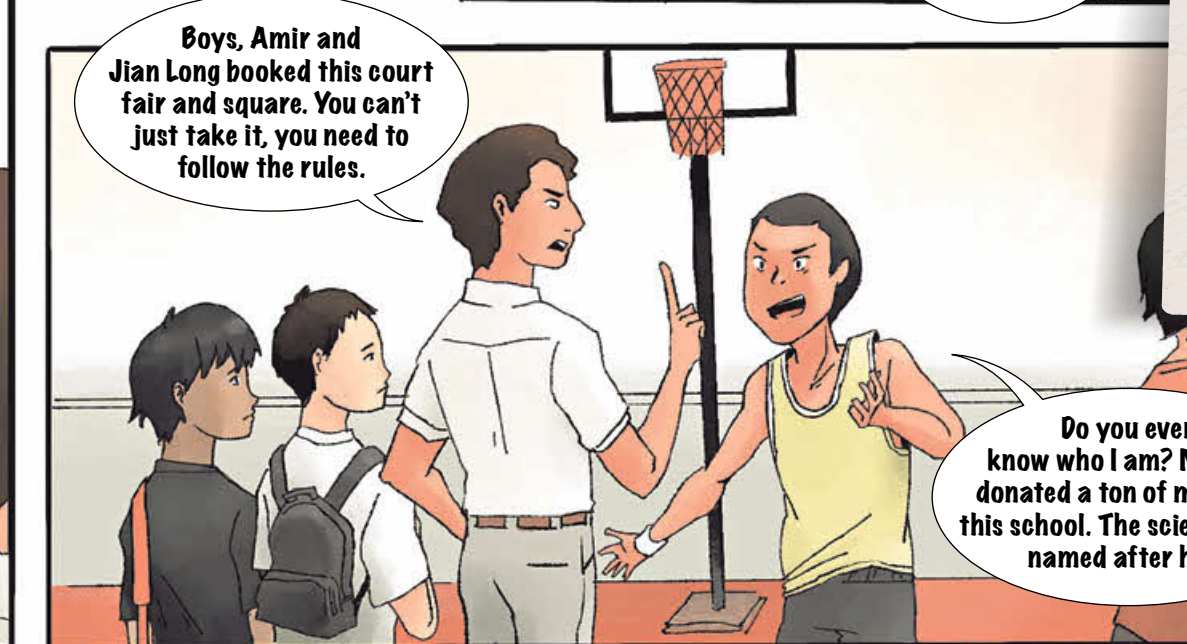
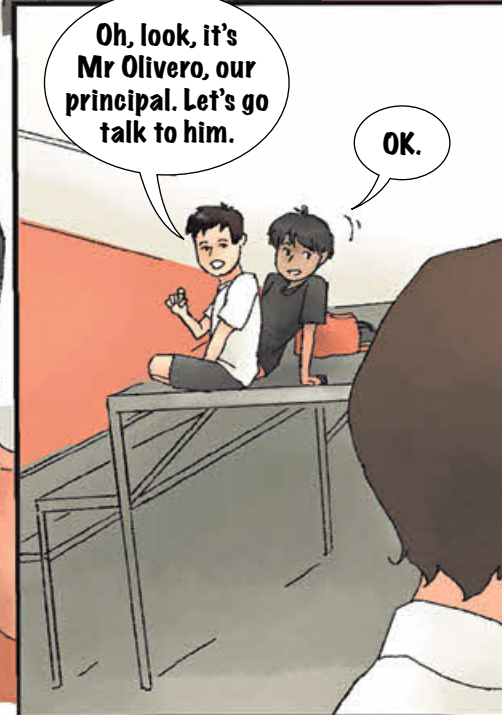
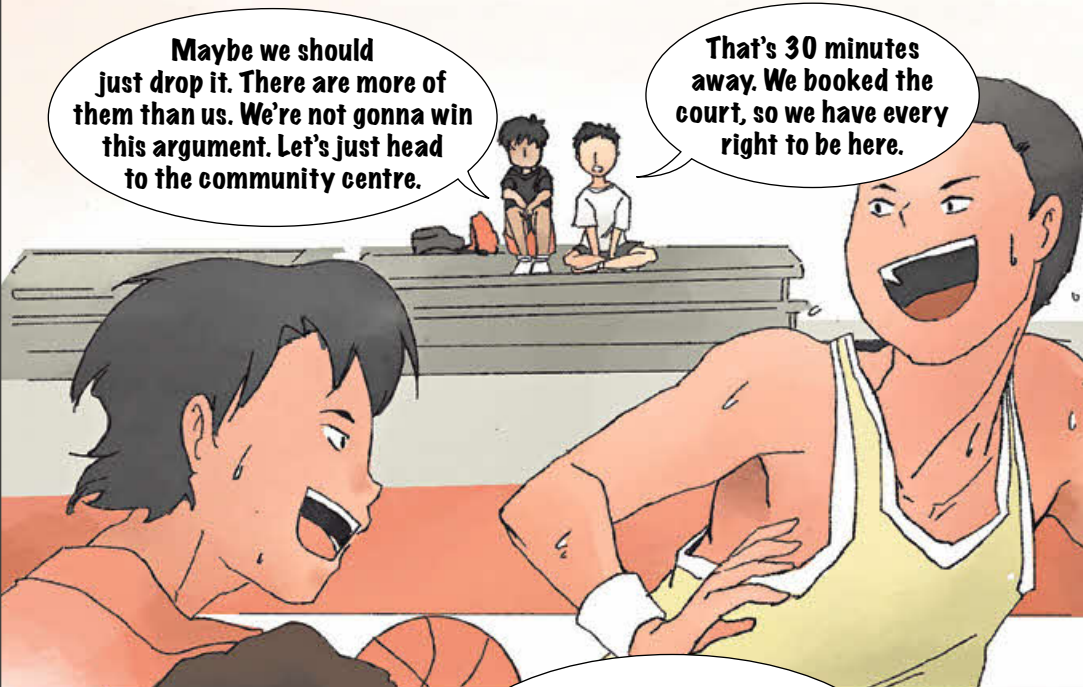
Now, think beyond the basketball court and in the context of Singapore. The story of how our pioneering generation and leaders transformed Singapore from a developing to developed country is familiar to all. But did you know that the rule of law had a part to play in it?

Laying the ground rules

In 1965, Singapore became an independent country after separating from Malaysia. Back then, it was a small, vulnerable nation with few natural resources, no nearby markets and limited trade opportunities. To survive, the Government focused on growing the economy. It made two key decisions: first, to grow industries that could export goods overseas instead of relying on imports, and second, to attract multinational corporations to invest and set up operations in Singapore.

Law and order

But this plan wouldn't have worked without a strong foundation – the rule of law. The rule of law protects the right of investors, keeps their assets safe, fights corruption, and ensures agreements are respected and disputes are settled fairly. Singapore's founding leaders knew this and made sure the nation had a fair and reliable legal system. Singapore remains committed to the rule of law, to ensure its continued success.



THINK IT THROUGH

DISCUSS THESE QUESTIONS WITH YOUR CLASSMATES AND TEACHER TO DIVE DEEPER INTO THE RULE OF LAW

- 1 Why is the rule of law so important?
- 2 What happens if there is no system to book the basketball court? How will it impact those who cannot use it?
- 3 What happens if Mr Olivero decides to side with Bruce, just because his father is rich? Would that be fair?
- 4 What if Mr Olivero makes up a new rule, like flipping a coin to decide who gets the court? Who should decide on the rules?



This content is adapted from the Conversations with the Community series. Scan to find out more.

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MEET THE PEOPLE IN A CRIMINAL TRIAL

What do judges and lawyers do during a court proceeding? Here is a first-hand look at the different people in a courtroom.

Did you know?

Family members and the public can sit in the gallery to watch the trial, but they are not to disrupt the proceedings.

1 Judge

- She hears arguments from the prosecution and the defence, then decides based on the law and facts. As judges represent the state, they are impartial and neutral.
- If the accused person pleads not guilty, the judge considers all the evidence before deciding on a guilty or not guilty (acquittal) verdict. If found guilty, the judge will decide on the sentence.
- Parties unsatisfied with the court's decision can appeal against the conviction or sentence.

2 Court officer

- Assists the judge in court proceedings.
- Before a hearing starts, the court officer ensures the correct documents are organised and arranges for an interpreter, if needed. He makes sure the courtroom is ready.
- During the hearing, he helps to ensure the proceedings go on smoothly. After the court session, he prepares the court orders, such as a warrant of remand, which are routed to the Singapore Prison Service.

3 Accused person

- The accused person can choose to plead guilty or claim trial. If he claims trial, the court will decide if he is guilty.
- He can either hire a lawyer or represent himself. If the accused person cannot afford a lawyer, he can apply for legal assistance.
- When attending court, the accused person must show up in court in person if he is out on bail. If he is in remand, he will appear via video link if he pleads guilty.

4 Defence counsel

- Represents the accused person in court. While her job is to stand up for her client (the accused person), she has an ethical duty to the court and is not to mislead it. For example, presenting false evidence that could benefit her client.
- During a trial, the defence counsel arranges for witnesses and experts to testify for the accused person.
- The defence counsel argues for the best possible outcome for her client, including asking for a lighter sentence.

5 Prosecutor

- He decides what charges to file against an accused person and proves to the court that the accused person committed the offence.
- Depending on the case, the prosecutor could be a deputy or assistant public prosecutor from the Attorney-General's Chambers, a police prosecutor from the Singapore Police Force, or a department prosecutor from an enforcement agency like the Land Transport Authority.
- Before the trial, the prosecutor decides on the witnesses who will testify. He will ask them questions during the proceedings.

6 Witness


- Provides testimony by sharing what he saw or knows and answers questions from prosecutors, the defence counsel or the judge. Both the prosecution and defence can call their own witnesses.
- Before testifying, a witness must take an oath or affirmation to tell the truth.
- Vulnerable witnesses, such as children or victims of violence and sexual offences, may be referred to the Vulnerable Witness Support Programme, which offers guidance and emotional support throughout the court hearing.

Did you know?


If the accused person or witness wishes to speak in Mandarin, Malay, Tamil or other foreign languages, the court can arrange for an interpreter to explain the proceedings, which are conducted in English.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

GUESS THE LEGAL WORDS FROM THESE BASIC EXPLANATIONS

 When a lawyer questions the other side's witness, what is he doing?

 What is it called when a person is found not guilty in court?

 If one party is not happy with the judge's decision, he or she may be able to ask a higher court to look at the case again. What is this process called?



Scan to find out more about the role and functions of the judiciary

Answers (Clockwise from left): Cross-examination, Acquitted, Appeal



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HOW DOES A JUDGE RULE ON A CRIMINAL CASE?

Just like deciding who wins a debate, a judge carefully examines all the facts and arguments before sentencing. Read on to find out how she does it

In Singapore, more than 90 per cent of criminal cases are handled by the State Courts which are made up of various courts and tribunals. Criminal cases may be heard either in the District Courts, which hear crimes that carry a punishment of up to 10 years in jail or a fine, and the Magistrates' Courts, which hear crimes that carry a punishment of up to five years in jail or a fine.

During a trial, the judge has to make a decision by interpreting and applying the law. But how do they do it? What is their thought process before they say, "I find the accused guilty"? Let's dive into how they make those big decisions.

1 Preparing for cases

- In the State Courts, a district judge or a magistrate will hear criminal cases.
- Just like how you prepare for class, the judge reviews a case before the trial starts so she is able to make an informed decision.

2 During the trial

- The judge listens to evidence from both the prosecution (which represents the State) and defence (which represents an accused person).
- The judge determines what really happened and whether someone is guilty based on how truthful and reliable the evidence is from both sides.
- At the end of the trial, both sides give their closing statements to summarise the evidence presented in court and to persuade the judge to decide the case in their favour.

3 Deliberation and decision

- After closing submissions, the judge has to make a decision and announce a verdict.
- If an accused person is found guilty, the case will proceed to the mitigation and sentencing stage where the judge will decide how the accused person is sentenced. If the accused person is acquitted, it means the charges have not been proven beyond a reasonable doubt and the trial process comes to an end.

4 Sentencing

- When deciding on a sentence, the judge looks closely at the facts and circumstances of each case. She is guided by the minimum and maximum sentence range and options specified by the law. She also has to consider sentencing principles (see sidebar) to ensure all offenders are equal before the law, regardless of their social status and academic qualifications.
- If the accused is not satisfied with the verdict or sentence (or both), he or she can appeal within 14 days.

Did you know?

- Jury trials were abolished in 1969 and capital offences used to be heard by two judges. On Apr 18, 1992, the rules changed to have one judge hear such cases.
- In deciding on the appropriate sentence, the court will usually take into account four key sentencing principles:

Deterrence

Ensuring the punishment stops the offender from repeating the crime and deters others from committing the same offence.

Rehabilitation

Helping the offender change for the better.

Proportionate punishment

Ensuring the sentence fits the seriousness of the crime.

Prevention

Making sure the offender doesn't cause further harm.

TEST YOUR LEGAL KNOWLEDGE

1. Who heads the judiciary?
A. Prime Minister B. Minister of Law C. Chief Justice

2. What happens when a politician commits a crime?
A. The politician can pardon himself.
B. The politician can ask the Chief Justice to find him not guilty.
C. The politician can be charged with a crime.

3. What can you do if you disagree with a sentence?
A. Accept the ruling and move on without any further action.
B. File an appeal to a higher court for a review of the decision.
C. Refuse to follow the ruling.

Answers: 1. (C) The Chief Justice is the head of the judiciary. 2. (C) No one is above the law, not even a politician. The politician cannot interfere or instruct a judge on how to decide cases. The judge must decide a case according to the law and the principles of justice and fairness. 3. (B) If you disagree with the ruling, you can appeal against the conviction or sentence if there is a basis for it.



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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A BUSINESS GOES BUST

SPECIAL FEATURE

Any company can run into money troubles. This fictional story shows how the courts can help struggling firms and make sure things are fair for both business owners and creditors

Lately, Brian has noticed his dad, Edwin Chan, looking worried. As the managing director of a hybrid and electric vehicle (EV) dealership, business isn't going well. He spends hours on long calls. Concerned, Brian finally asks what's wrong.

BRIAN: "Pa, why are you always on the phone these days? Business not doing well?"

MR CHAN: "It's been tough. Our electric and hybrid cars sold well for years because they are better for the environment, but since petrol prices have dropped by 30 per cent, people prefer petrol cars now. I took business loans to buy these EVs and I have to pay interest every month. But with sales so slow, I'm barely covering salaries and warehouse fees, let alone the loan payments."

BRIAN: "What happens when the company can't pay its loans?"

MR CHAN: "Well, if I can't pay the banks — our creditors — they can ask the court to wind up the business and liquidate it. That means selling off everything, including the unsold cars, to pay off debts.
But the market is so bad now, the cars aren't worth much, so the creditors won't even recover all their money. I'd have to fire my staff, and all the goodwill I've built with customers would be gone. It's such a waste. If the creditors are patient and let the business recover, they could get their money back with interest."

BRIAN: "What else can you do?"

MR CHAN: "I've been talking to a business lawyer about ways to save the company. This is just a rough season for electric cars, oil prices will rise again, and people will realise EVs save money in the long run.
We're negotiating with creditors too. Some might accept a smaller sum for quick repayment, while others could agree to delay payments or pause interest. If they work with us, we can keep the business going and ride out this setback."

BRIAN: "How can the law help your business?"

MR CHAN: "We can ask the court to pause creditor lawsuits, giving the company time to focus on its business and debt restructuring without legal distractions. To ensure fairness, the court may appoint a third party to oversee our spending and make sure we are not wasteful.
The court can also grant orders that support the company in obtaining new loans, often hard to secure when a company is in financial difficulties. New loans can help to cover rent and overheads, helping the company stay afloat while negotiating with creditors."

BRIAN: "Thanks for explaining, Pa. I hope the court can help save your business. It'd be a pity to close over a few bad months."

MR CHAN: "That's right, son. The court needs to be fair to both businesses and creditors. If we handle this well, the creditors get their money, and the business survives — good for my employees and the economy too."

BUSINESS RESCUE CHALLENGE



Work in teams to take on roles like Mr Chan, a creditor, an employee and a judge. Discuss and negotiate a plan to rescue the business using insights from the article. Can you find a solution that works for everyone?



This content is adapted from the Conversations with the Community series. Scan to find out more.

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THE LAWS OF NATURE

Like many countries, Singapore is also vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Read on to find out how the laws and the judiciary contribute to protecting the environment

The rule of law plays a big role in how the courts tackle global environmental challenges, making sure countries and companies take responsibility for their impact on the planet. It is like having guardians for the environment – a system of rules and protection that make sure wildlife, plants, air and water are looked after.

Singapore's climate policy follows a growing global belief that nobody owns the planet, they are just looking after it for future generations. This means everyone has a responsibility to protect the environment, not just for themselves but also for all living things. Laws are made to ensure companies stay honest about how their actions affect the environment and their future finances.

As the courts' role is to interpret the law, not make the law, the courts will step in when the law requires them to, ensuring rules are followed and responsibility is upheld. By applying these laws fairly, courts and regulators help keep businesses accountable, not just to their customers, but also to investors, creditors and society as a whole. This is all part of protecting the planet and making sure it stays liveable for future generations. Here are some ways the courts and the law help create a more sustainable future and protect the environment.



1

Oil spill accountability

Singapore's courts follow the law fairly and consistently, making sure legal rules align with environmental policies. An example of this approach is the case of Ventura Navigation v Port of Singapore Authority – an oil pollution case, where a tanker ship carrying oil fuel encountered a tank rupture which resulted in an oil spill. The oil drifted from Malaysia to Singapore's territorial waters, causing environmental pollution.

By applying the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea Act and the Merchant Shipping (Oil Pollution) Act, the Singapore High Court ruled that the owners of the ship were responsible for the costs of cleaning up the oil pollution. This is in line with the "polluter pays" principle, which ensures those who pollute the environment must clean up or pay for the clean-up.

2

Safeguarding wildlife

The Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act is a law that prohibits anyone from bringing wildlife into or out of Singapore without a valid permit, or advertising wildlife for sale. It ensures that people and wildlife can live in harmony. Besides protecting wild animals, it also reduces potentially dangerous contact between animals and humans, which can cause injury and diseases.

This law has successfully allowed authorities to seize and prevent illegally traded animal parts like pangolin scales and elephant ivory. People convicted of this offence can be fined or imprisoned. The penalties are higher for protected wildlife species, such as the rare Sunda pangolin and straw-headed bulbul.

3

Tackling pollution

The Environmental Protection and Management Act is a law which protects the environment from air, water and land pollution. This includes emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change.

For example, a factory which burns fuel for its operations must install equipment to control air pollution. This allows people living around the factory to still enjoy fresh air. If the factory fails to do so, the Government can bring the occupier of the factory to court and punish them. The company can be fined for polluting. If the company continues to pollute, the court can impose a continuing fine until it stops polluting.

4

No misleading claims

Greenwashing is when companies make their products sound more environmentally friendly than they really are. If consumers choose products based on such misleading environmental claims, they can unintentionally cause greater harm to the environment by choosing these products. This is why the Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act bans unfair practices like making a false claim, misleading or deceiving consumers.

This law encourages companies to be truthful and accurate about their environmental claims. In turn, consumers can be assured that they are choosing more environmentally safe products. From 2025, companies listed on the Singapore Exchange must report on their sustainability and climate information. For example, companies like DBS Bank, SBS Transit and Sheng Shiong Group must report on their greenhouse gas emissions.

BE A GREENWASHING DETECTIVE

Take a close look at a product packaging, advertisement or online promotion that claims to be sustainable, organic or environmentally safe. Then, do some research – are these claims backed by real evidence or are they just greenwashing? Work in teams to dig deeper, compare findings and present your conclusions to the class.



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This content is adapted from the Conversations with the Community series. Scan to find out more.

SG Courts

MY PARENTS ARE GETTING
A DIVORCE - HOW NOW?

Juggling school, friendships, and the ever-changing TikTok feed — being a teen is anything but simple. But for some, there's an added weight: Their parents are going through a divorce. It's a tough and often confusing time. To support families through this, the Family Justice Courts (FJC) apply the Therapeutic Justice Model. But what exactly is it and how does it help families with children?

1 Guides families towards a better tomorrow

The Therapeutic Justice Model helps families move forward by focusing on solutions, not blame. It's a judge-led process where the husband and wife, their lawyers, and other professionals reach lasting outcomes by working together. Parents play a key role in cooperating together to put their children's best interest first and prioritise their welfare.

3

Focuses on support, not fights

Parents are expected to take responsibility for family issues and work together to find lasting, amicable solutions, ideally out of court. If court intervention is needed, parents and lawyers must cooperate to resolve issues respectfully and constructively. The court may also link families to support services to strengthen co-parenting and provide emotional support. In suitable cases, children may receive counselling support. Selected cases are managed by a multidisciplinary team consisting of a judge, mediator and court family specialist to provide a customised approach to resolve issues before they become worse.



Puts children first

When a marriage involves children under 21, the court prioritises their welfare in the course of the divorce. Parents must attend mediation and counselling facilitated by a judge-mediator and court family specialist. Parents are expected to protect children from conflict and prioritise their children's welfare above their own.

4 Problem-solving judges and supportive lawyers

Judges take a problem-solving approach, working with court family specialists to help families reach lasting solutions with minimal conflict. Family lawyers must explain the Therapeutic Justice approach to their clients, help reduce acrimony and find common ground for better outcomes.

Family first: What this real case teaches us

In a real-life recent family case in Singapore, the mother was the primary caregiver of the children, but the father wanted to spend more time with them. Both sides raised concerns and made accusations against the other.

Instead of letting the conflict grow, the court stepped in. It ordered a Custody Evaluation Report, which is a comprehensive assessment on the family, identifying the parties' parenting capacity, and the developmental needs and psychological interests of the children. This was prepared by an agency appointed by the Ministry of Social and Family Development. The court also created a temporary plan to ensure the children maintained regular contact with their father.

What the judge emphasised

The judge reminded everyone that time with the children is not about exact minutes, it is about building strong relationships. Fighting over details only hurts the children. The court also stressed for parents to:

- Take ownership: Be responsible for their family issues

- **Work together:** Focus on cooperation, not blame
- **Put children first:** Their well-being matters most
- **Be respectful:** A calm, kind attitude helps everyone

Planning for the future

The court arranged for the father to spend more time with his children, especially during the holidays. The judge urged the parents to stay flexible and adjust plans as the children's needs change, and encouraged the parents to continue working with a psychologist to strengthen their co-parenting approach.

The takeaway

This case shows that the courts go beyond settling disputes, to help families heal

By focusing on practical solutions and putting children first, the Therapeutic Justice Model guides parents to build a more peaceful and supportive environment for their children.

So the next time you think about the court, remember, it's not just about rules. It's about helping families grow stronger — even during the tough times.

QUIZ TIME

1. What is the main goal of the Family Justice Courts' Therapeutic Justice Model for divorce cases?
- A) To decide who wins and who loses in a case
 - B) To punish parents who get divorced
 - C) To help families find enduring solutions and move towards the best possible future

- 2. What usually happens first when a divorce case involving children is brought to the Family Justice Courts?**
- A) Parents immediately enter into a divorce hearing
 - B) Counselling and mediation are offered first
 - C) The court sends the child to live with relatives

ANSWERS: 1. C (The court now focuses on solving problems and helping families move forward.) 2. B (Any divorce case involving children under the age of 21, and unresolved issues, begins with counselling and mediation. The goal is to reduce conflict early on.)



This content is adapted from the Conversations with the Community series. Scan to find out more.

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SG Courts

TECH TOOLS TO HELP YOU HELP YOURSELF

When you're dealing with legal problems, it can be costly and feel overwhelming. To make things easier, here are some digital solutions to help you navigate the justice system

As you get older, life can get complicated. You might run into some legal issues and need assistance to resolve the matter. You can choose to hire a lawyer to help you or choose to represent yourself. Here are six online tools developed by various organisations that can help you if you have legal concerns.



1 Figuring out liability and damages after a motor accident

Involved in a motor accident? You or the other party may need to seek compensation for vehicle damage or injuries.

Determining each party's share of responsibility and compensation in an accident can be challenging. You can figure this out by using the Motor Accident Claims Online (MACO) simulator. By providing details of the circumstances of the accident, MACO can give a rough indication of how much responsibility each party bears, and how much compensation you can get (or will have to pay).

This can help the parties involved in an accident to decide whether to settle the matter out of court or to file a civil claim.



2 Getting clarity through a trusted source

When dealing with legal disputes, it can be daunting and overwhelming to access legal information. This adds to the stress of an already difficult situation.

Without guidance, online information can be confusing, misleading or factually wrong. That's why Pro Bono SG and the Ministry of Law set up www.lawgowhere.sg – a website where users can easily find the information or resources for their specific needs, such as information on family law or civil and criminal matters.

Through a simple questionnaire, the website directs you to authentic legal sources and explanatory YouTube videos to guide you through the process. The website also includes recorded webinars on topics like protecting yourself against scams and workplace harassment.

5 Simplifying the probate process

A Grant of Probate legally recognises an individual as the executor of a deceased's estate. The appointed individual manages the deceased's property. This includes distributing the estate to the beneficiaries after payment of the deceased's debts and other expenses.

The appointed individual can apply for a Grant of Probate through the Probate eService. This online platform simplifies the process by guiding the executor in preparing and submitting probate documents to the court.

The service auto-fills information from government records and allows online payments. If everything is in order, the Grant of Probate is issued without a court hearing.



4 Ensuring a court order is authentic

When you receive a document from someone and it looks to be a court order from the Singapore Courts, how do you know if it is issued by a Singapore court? You do not want to be fooled by a scam, but if you ignore it, there might be serious consequences for not doing something the court has ordered you to do.

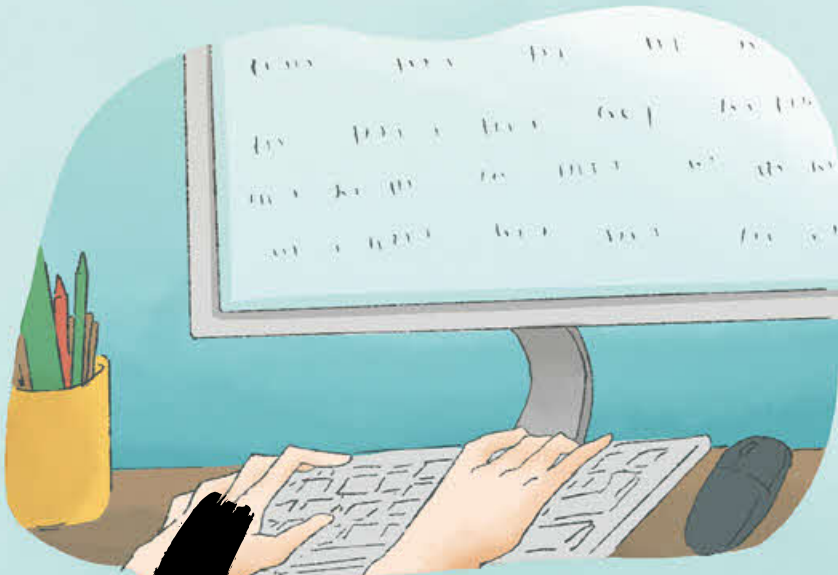
The Singapore Courts have introduced the Authentic Court Orders (ACO) system, making it easier and more efficient to verify if a court document is genuine, and at no cost. You no longer have to make multiple trips to court to obtain certified true copies of court orders, which could take several days and incur costs.

With the ACO system, you can validate a court order online by scanning the QR code printed on the document or visiting the ACO website. The system will retrieve an official digital copy of the court order that you can download immediately. The ACO system also acts as an anti-scam measure. By comparing the court order you have on hand and the downloaded version, you can verify the authenticity of the document.



3 Applying and managing cases online

For cases under the Small Claims Tribunals, Employment Claims Tribunals, Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals or the Protection from Harassment Court, you can conveniently file your claims online at any time of the day through the Community Justice and Tribunals System (CJTS). With the CJTS, you can file and access documents, review your case details, check upcoming hearing dates and participate in eMediation and eNegotiation all from the convenience of your device.



6 Using GenAI to navigate small claims

The Singapore Courts has partnered a generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) company to introduce GenAI capabilities to help users navigate matters at the Small Claims Tribunals. Some of these features include document translation and case summarisation capabilities.



This content is adapted from the Conversations with the Community series. Scan to find out more.

QUIZ TIME!

?

1. What tool helps parties in a motor accident gauge who might be at fault?
2. How can you verify if a court order you received is real?
3. What website provides trusted legal information and resources?

Answers: Motor Accident Claims Online, scan the QR code on the court order or check through the Authentic Court Orders System, www.lawgowhere.sg

MAKING JUSTICE SIMPLE AND ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL

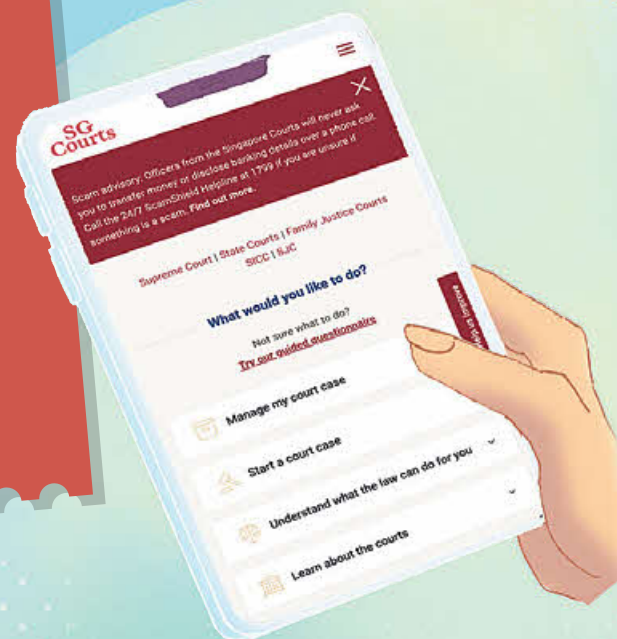
Linking court users to services

While the courts cannot give legal advice, they help bridge the gap by directing the public to free legal clinics run by Pro Bono SG and the on-site clinic at the Community Justice Centre in the State Courts, which offers basic legal advice. The courts also have programmes for court users who may need support and guidance. Volunteers will be there to assist in mediation or provide emotional support.

Extending outreach and public education

The courts are stepping up public outreach to help people understand the courts better. They've launched bite-sized "How-To" videos on their YouTube channel, and started "Conversations with the Community", a series of community events, to explain the courts' role in society and why it matters. For students, a programme titled "F.A.I.R. but Not Square" introduces the judiciary through an interactive mock trial. Students role-play as judges, applying the courts' principles of Fairness, Accessibility, Integrity and Respect to learn how the courts make fair decisions and treat everyone equally. Another community outreach initiative, the Justice Awareness @ Heartlands sessions share useful information on specific topics and promote awareness of available court services.

Caught in a dispute and don't know where to start? From online guides and service hubs to an AI assistant, the Singapore Courts (SG Courts) is making it easier for everyone to understand and access justice. Whether it's empowering court users to navigate court processes, promoting amicable solutions or helping people understand their rights, these offerings are all about one goal: ensuring that no one is left behind when it comes to justice.



Online digital guide

SG Courts is making it easier for court users, especially those without lawyers, to navigate the legal system. Their website (www.judiciary.gov.sg) offers guides in simplified English and self-help tools for civil and employment claims, neighbour disputes and harassment. There is also a guided digital questionnaire that provides relevant, practical information based on user responses to a short series of questions.

Saving time, speeding up processes

The Community Justice and Tribunals System lets court users file and access cases on tribunals and the Protection from Harassment Court anytime, anywhere. This saves time and eases the administrative burden, especially for those with busy schedules. SG Courts has also partnered an AI generative company to offer AI-powered translation services and case summaries for the Small Claims Tribunals.



Alternatives to going to trial

Since people may not hire lawyers for small claims, employment claims or neighbour disputes, judges in the tribunals who hear such cases take a judge-led approach — guiding parties through the process and overseeing the case. The State Courts also offers alternative dispute resolution methods like mediation, conciliation and neutral evaluation, which can resolve cases more quickly and affordably than a full trial.



Simplifying processes with digital tools

Digital tools help court users with motor accident claims, bankruptcy filings, probate applications and divorce proceedings. For example, by providing details of an accident, the Motor Accident Claims Online simulator estimates how much responsibility each party in a traffic accident has to bear and how much compensation they might get, or have to pay. A bankruptcy tool assists with document preparation, while the Probate eService helps executors apply for a Grant of Probate. Service hubs at the Supreme Court, State Courts and Family Justice Courts also offer in-person assistance.



QUIZ TIME

1) Which of the following cannot be found on the Singapore Courts' website?

- A) A directory of lawyers in Singapore
- B) Information on family, civil and criminal law
- C) A guided digital questionnaire

2) What is Conversations with the Community by the Singapore Courts?

- A) A reality television show about court cases
- B) A hotline for legal emergencies
- C) A series of community events to explain how the courts work

3) What is the Singapore Courts' website address?

- A) www.judiciary.gov.sg
- B) www.sgcourts.gov.sg
- C) www.singaporelaw.gov.sg

ANSWERS: 1) A, 2) C, 3) A



Curious about how the courts work? Scan to read more and follow SG Courts' social channels.

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www.judiciary.gov.sg