

A photograph of a prison hallway. The walls are a dull, institutional blue. On both sides, there are cell doors made of vertical metal bars. The floor is a dark, polished surface that reflects the light. The perspective is from the end of the hallway, looking down its length.

# We are all criminals now

A Talking Points lesson for  
English reading & speaking

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Breaking The Law! Breaking The Law!.....	4
Reading Comprehension Questions.....	7
Essential Vocabulary.....	9
Discussion Questions.....	11
Writing.....	14
Credits.....	15

## **Introduction**

Have you ever broken the law?

Can you tell the class about it?

Is it common to break the law do you think?

## Breaking The Law! Breaking The Law!

***What crimes have you committed recently?***

***What laws have you broken?***

Think carefully because most people like to think they never break the law. But in fact, many of us commit a crime, even though only a minor misdemeanour, almost every day.

Such crimes could be any of the following:

- Taking a pen from the office and using it at home
- Jaywalking across the street
- Finding money on the sidewalk and keeping it
- Throwing a small candy wrapper in the gutter

***These are real crimes.***

Crimes that, if you were caught by a policeman, you could receive a fine or some other punishment.

Top legal experts argue that it is almost impossible to not break the law. As soon as you leave the house, you are committing a

petty crime.

Take, for example, the case of the man who found a lost wallet on the street. He picked it up, checked the inside and found the owner's name inside. He then put it in his pocket, intending to take it to the police station.

Unfortunately, he did not get that far. Another person witnessed him picking it up and immediately called the police. The police arrived and promptly arrested the man.

He pleaded innocence, but a nearby security camera saw everything.

The man had to go to court and was advised to plead guilty.

***He did so and had to go to prison for two weeks.***

Then there is the case of the couple taking photographs of each other in the city. The man took a picture of his wife in front of a beautiful building. However, no photography was permitted in front of this building. A policeman arrived on the scene and took the couple to the police station for questioning.

They were both badly shaken up, but were allowed to leave after deleting all the pictures they took on that day.

Finally, there is the story of a young woman who crossed the road at a pedestrian crossing. But was still arrested.

Why? Because when she crossed the road, her foot momentarily left the black and white stripes of the pedestrian crossing. This is regarded as jaywalking and the woman had to pay a hefty fine.

***A tough lesson to learn over something so trivial, but the law is the law.***

Many people argue that the law is so complex that it is impossible to know every single law of the land. But the courts often say that ignorance of the law is no excuse.

So people go about their lives believing they are law-abiding citizens when, in fact, they are criminals.

There is also the notion of when we travel abroad. How can we possibly know the law in a foreign land? Many people are arrested because they did something without knowing there could be serious repercussions afterwards.

**So, next time you leave your house, be careful!**

***You could be breaking several laws at once. And you could be***

***punished for it.***

## Reading Comprehension Questions

According to the article, what is one reason why most people believe they never break the law?

What are some examples of minor crimes mentioned in the article?

What potential consequences could someone face if they were caught committing one of these minor crimes?

Why do top legal experts argue that it is almost impossible to not break the law?

Can you provide an example from the article that illustrates how someone unintentionally broke the law and faced legal consequences?

What happened to the man who found a lost wallet and intended to take it to the police station?

What evidence led to the man being convicted and sent to prison?

Describe the incident involving the couple taking photographs in front of a building. What were the consequences for them?

What mistake did the young woman make when crossing the

road, and what was the result?

How does the article emphasize that ignorance of the law is not an acceptable excuse?

What do some people argue about the complexity of the law and knowing all the laws of the land?

In what situation could people face legal repercussions while travelling abroad?

According to the article, how many laws could someone potentially be breaking when they leave their house?

What is the main message or lesson the article is trying to convey?

## Essential Vocabulary

crimes	committed	a minor misdemeanour
jaywalking	sidewalk	candy wrapper
gutter	fine	punishment
legal	a petty crime	wallet
intending	witnessed	promptly
arrested	pleaded	innocence
security camera	court	advised
to plead guilty	prison	permitted
on the scene	questioning	badly shaken up
deleting	pedestrian crossing	momentarily
stripes	regarded	a hefty fine
trivial	complex	ignorance
no excuse	law-abiding citizens	criminals
notion	abroad	foreign
repercussions	several	punished

### Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each

word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

**Crimes** – *actions deemed illegal by the authorities.*

**Committed** – *pledged or bound to a certain policy.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

***There has been a rise in petty crimes in the neighbourhood.***

***The man admitted to taking the book, but believed he committed no crime.***

Do this with all the vocabulary and, over time, this will help improve all your English skills — reading, writing, speaking and listening.



## Discussion Questions

Have you ever broken the law?

What laws have you broken? Tell the class.

Have you ever taken something from your workplace without permission? What was it and why did you take it?

Do you think this is acceptable behaviour?

Do you think minor misdemeanours, such as taking a pen from the office, should be considered a crime? Why or why not?

Have you ever jaywalked? Why did you do it, and were you aware that it was against the law?

How do you feel about finding money on the sidewalk and keeping it? Is it morally wrong even if it's illegal?

Have you ever thrown litter on the street or in the gutter? Why did you do it, and do you think it's a serious offence?

What would you do if you found a lost wallet on the street? Would you keep it or try to return it to the owner? Why?

How do you think the man in the story could have avoided getting arrested for picking up the lost wallet?

Should taking pictures be prohibited in certain areas? Why or why not?

Have you ever been in a situation where you took a picture in a place where photography was not allowed? What happened?

Do you think deleting the pictures was a fair consequence for the couple in the story? Why or why not?

Is taking photographs legal in your city? What can people take pictures of? What can they not take pictures of?

Did the couple who took a picture of the building break the law? Should there be a sign to tell them not to take pictures?

What are your thoughts on the idea of momentarily stepping off the pedestrian crossing and being fined for jaywalking? Is it fair or too strict?

What are the laws about crossing the road in your country? Tell the class.

Did the young woman crossing the road in the article really break the law? Or was the policeman being petty?

Have you ever received a fine or punishment for a minor offence? What was it, and how did you feel about it?

Do you think it's possible to know every law of the land? Why or why not?

What could be done to improve people's awareness of the laws in their country?

How do you feel about the concept that ignorance of the law is not an excuse? Is it fair or should there be exceptions?

What challenges do you think people face when travelling abroad regarding unfamiliar laws and regulations?

Have you ever travelled to a foreign country and unknowingly violated a law? What happened, and how did you handle the situation?

Should tourists be given more information about local laws and regulations before visiting a foreign country? Why or why not?

How can individuals educate themselves about the laws of a foreign country before travelling there?

Do you think the punishment for breaking certain laws is too severe? Can you provide an example?

Try to think of a list of petty crimes that people commit on a daily basis. Things like jaywalking and littering. Brainstorm and come up with 8 more items.

What is the thinking behind breaking these laws? Do people just not care? Why not?

What new laws would you like to see in your country? Tell the class your ideas.



## Writing

**This is a writing exercise.**

You are going to write an article of your own based on the article for reading above.

The title of your article is:

### **Laws and Everyday Crimes**

Read the article carefully and consider the examples provided of everyday crimes.

Reflect on your own actions and think about the laws you may have unintentionally broken. Then, write a short essay discussing your thoughts and experiences related to breaking the law.

Make sure your article has five paragraphs.

- introduction
- point 1
- point 2
- point 3
- conclusion

When you have finished writing your article, read it out loud in front of the class.

***Or you can give it to your teacher for review.***

## Credits

This lesson plan is courtesy of ManWrites.

This content is copyright ManWrites 2023 — ManWrites©2023

For more information, go to [www.manwrites.com](http://www.manwrites.com)

Or join my mailing list below and I will send you more ESL teaching ideas.

[\*\*ManWrites Mailing List\*\*](#)