



Students Separating Powers

Law Week Students Characterize Separation of Powers Using See-Saws and Pop Culture

Students of all ages visited the Florida Supreme Court and learned about the courts and the Constitution as part of this year's Law Week educational festivities. The 2006 Law Week theme, "Separate Branches, Balanced Powers," provided the opportunity for elementary, middle, and high school students to write and draw about the three branches of government from their own perspectives.



Genaro Najera (center) stands with his teacher Marcia Workman and Chief Justice Barbara Pariente.

The theme was of critical importance this year as it followed on the heels of a Florida Bar poll conducted to determine how much Floridians know about the basic principles of democracy. The results echoed earlier findings of a national poll conducted by the American Bar Association in that less than 60 % could correctly identify the three branches of government and less than half understood the concepts of separation of powers and checks and balances.

Sabina Gonzalez, a first grader from Miami, drew a beautiful picture of a see-saw



Sabina Gonzalez explains her poster at the awards luncheon.

with the three branches of government depicted as part of the see-saw. Sabina described her picture saying, "Some people make the laws. Some people explain the laws. Some people make us obey the laws. This makes our country fair. The see-saw stays balanced when the three parts are working together."

"I'm not sure who enjoys this the most – the students, the parents, or the teachers!"

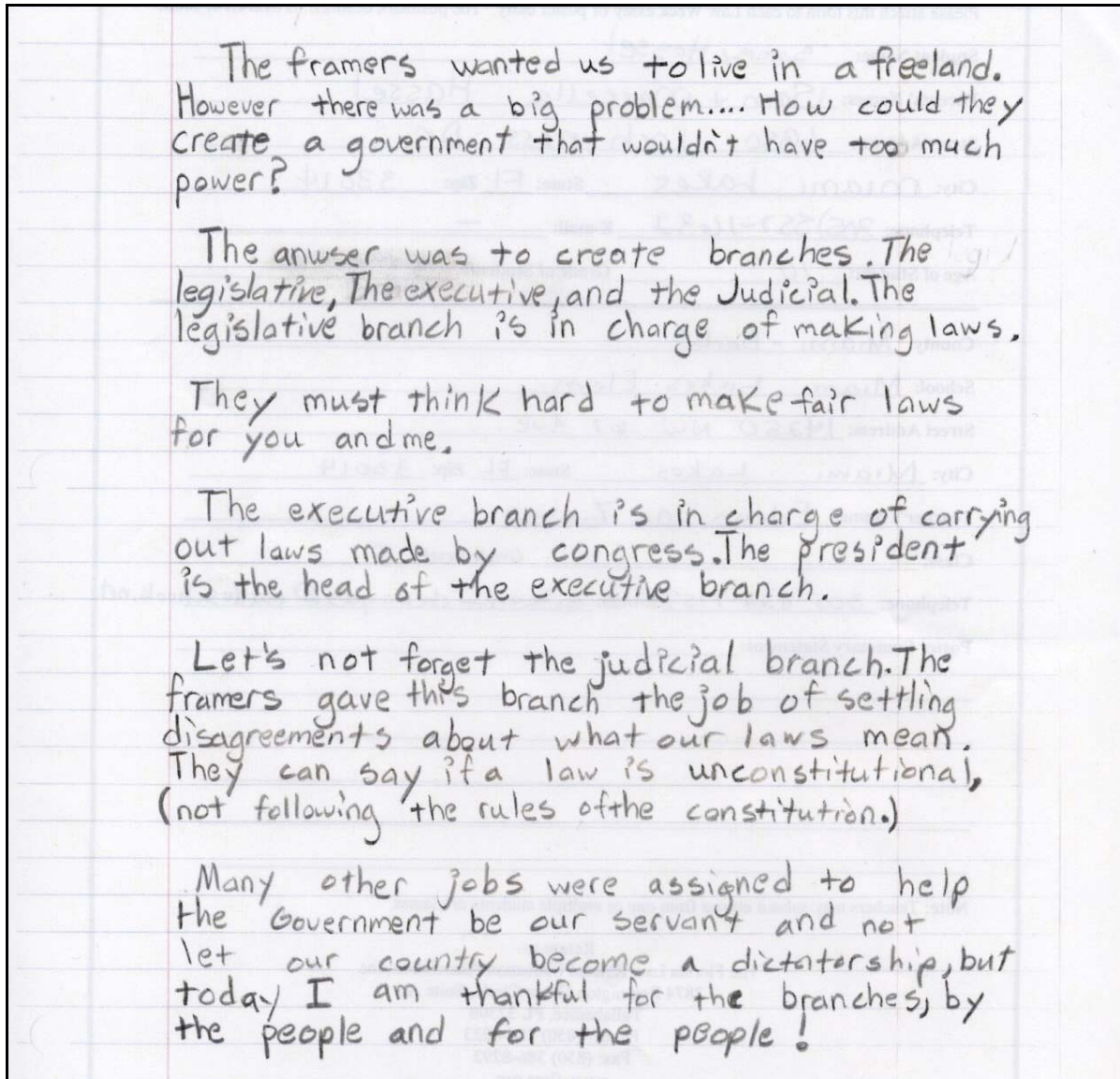
*-Annette Boyd Pitts
Executive Director
The Florida Law Related Education
Association, Inc.*

Students, their families, and teachers gathered at the Supreme Court to celebrate Law Week and learn about the judicial branch. The students, ranging in age from seven to seventeen, participated as attorneys and justices in a mock oral argument. They

were joined by high school students participating in the statewide moot court competition. A special behind-the-scenes tour of the Supreme Court was provided by their host for the morning, Justice R. Fred Lewis.

Each student read their essay during an awards luncheon held at Golden Eagle Country Club in Tallahassee. Chief Justice

Barbara Pariente hosted the awards luncheon and presented each award. Chief Justice Pariente asked fifth grader Sammy Hassel of Miami Lakes if she could use parts of his essay in some of her speeches. Sammy agreed and the Chief Justice said she would give him credit. Sammy wrote the winning essay for the elementary division.



The framers wanted us to live in a freeland. However there was a big problem.... How could they create a government that wouldn't have too much power?

The answer was to create branches. The legislative, The executive, and the Judicial. The legislative branch is in charge of making laws. They must think hard to make fair laws for you and me.

The executive branch is in charge of carrying out laws made by congress. The president is the head of the executive branch.

Let's not forget the judicial branch. The framers gave this branch the job of settling disagreements about what our laws mean. They can say if a law is unconstitutional, (not following the rules of the constitution.)

Many other jobs were assigned to help the government be our servant and not let our country become a dictatorship, but today I am thankful for the branches, by the people and for the people!

Sammy Hassel's essay for the 2006 Law Week competition.

A middle school student from Orange County likened the three branches of

government to Simon Cowell, Shaquille O'Neal, and Britney Spears. Cayla Cobb of

St. Andrew Catholic School stated, “By using people that we see on television, and hear on the radio, as examples, it is easier to relate to the branches and why they exist. Cayla’s essay can be found on the FLREA website at www.flrea.org under Law Week.

“This year’s theme emphasized what the Founders intended and accomplished in creating a government of separate powers,” stated Steve Shenkman, President of The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. “It was instrumental in demonstrating how the branches represent separate powers but together form a dynamic system that works for the common good,” Shenkman concluded.

The Law Week essay and poster contests are coordinated annually by the Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. The Supreme Court of Florida and its Justices host the students and their families and teachers. The Florida Bar and the Florida Bar Foundation provide financial support for the state-wide initiative. Over 700 entries were received this year, and the winning students are presented with acrylic trophies which look like replicas of the Supreme Court.

“I want my students to have this opportunity every year!”

*-Lorraine Silverstein
Teacher*

Miami-Killian Senior High School

Each teacher introduced their student at the awards ceremony. The Chief Justice spoke with each and every student and told them what she liked best about their essay or poster.

Teacher Lorraine Silverstein of Miami-Killian Senior High School prepares for Law Week at the beginning of each year. She posts winning entries from previous years and encourages her students to be creative. It worked this year as she had two

student winners in the high school division. “This is such a special program,” she commented. “I want my students to have this opportunity every year!”

“I’m not sure who enjoys this the



Samuel Radoff (right) and his teacher Lorraine Silverstein (left) showcase Radoff’s winning artwork.

most – the students, their parents, or their teachers!” stated Annette Boyd Pitts, Executive Director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. “Everyone learns so much and are so appreciative of the interactions with the Justices,” Pitts continued. Copies of the enlarged posters are on display in the Supreme Court.

Law Day was established in 1958 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to strengthen our great heritage of liberty, justice, and equality under law. Law Day celebrates the rule of law and underscores how law and the legal process have contributed to the freedoms that all Americans share. While May 1 is the official date, Law Day is often extended to be Law Week.

Additional Law Week festivities hosted by the Supreme Court included the High School Brief Writing and Moot Court Competition as well as the annual Justice Teaching Institute. For additional information on these and other law related education initiatives, visit www.flrea.org or www.floridasupremecourt.org.

2006 Law Week Winners

Essays

Sammy Hassel

Elementary Division

Miami Lakes

Elementary School

Cayla Cobb

Middle Division

St. Andrew

Catholic School

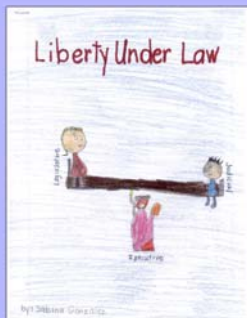
Peter Davis

High Division

Miami-Killian

Senior High School

Posters

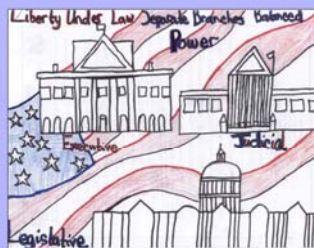


Sabina Gonzalez

K-2nd Grade Winner

G.W. Carver

Elementary School

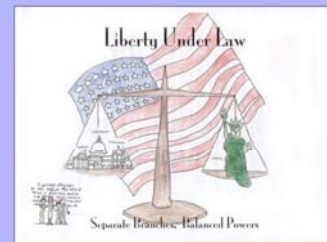


Genaro Najera

3rd-5th Grade Winner

Lacooche

Elementary School



Amanda Holland

6th-8th Grade Winner

Brentwood

Middle School



Samuel Radoff

9th-12th Grade Winner

Miami-Killian

Senior High School



Danny Schwartzman

Computer-Generated Winner

Cypress Bay

High School