

The Law is (not) for Kids: A Legal Rights Guide for Canadian Children and Teens

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

The Law is (not) for Kids: A Legal Rights Guide for Canadian Children and Teens

by Ned Lecic and Marvin Zuker

Athabasca University Press, 2019, 204 pages

ISBN 9781771992374 Paperback \$22.95

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Ned Lecic and Marvin Zuker's book, *The Law is not for Kids* is a legal rights guide for school aged children and teenagers on understanding and navigating their rights. This nine chapter book introduces the history of law and youth rights under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Canadian Constitution*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, United Nations Declaration of the *Rights of the Child*, and the *Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child*. It not only provides a roadmap for students to navigate the legal rights system, but also offers practical tools, strategies and resources to enable and empower them with choice, voice and activism. This book touches on aspects of the law that are not easily accessible or available to students currently.

This 289-page book, written by 2 authors is organized thematically by areas of law relevant to Canadian youth. It not only explains why law is important to understand, but delves into concepts of rights and responsibilities and how they go hand in hand. The book was written with the intention of providing a detailed and practical guide to the laws in Canada that determine children and youths' rights and responsibilities (p. viii).

The book begins with an articulation of the historical context of the law, and where and how law was developed. It highlights for students the three levels of government: federal, provincial and municipal and what each of these govern. It introduces critical legislation, the *Constitution Act* of 1867 and briefly touches on the *Indian Act* of 1876 and the special circumstances that enable it to fall under federal, and not provincial law, unlike education in all provinces in Canada that fall under provincial jurisdiction.

The book provides the rationale for international human rights law influencing domestic laws. For example, the 1948 UN General Assembly's adoption of the UN Declaration of Human Rights sparked a series of historical events: Amnesty International was established (1961), the Ontario Human Rights Commission was created (1961), the Ontario Human Rights Code was enacted (1962), the Canadian Human Rights Act was created (1977), the Canadian Bill of Rights was introduced (1979), the Charter of Rights and Freedoms became entrenched in the Constitution of Canada (1982). It also explains, in clear language, the difference between a Declaration and a Convention, with the former being legally binding (in most instances).

The chapter on the rights of the child in relation to education is an important one. "The law takes a big interest in education" (p. 121). This chapter explains to the student that education falls under provincial jurisdiction and is the responsibility of each province/territory. The authors ask and answer why education is essential to human development and provide examples of rights administered by the legal system in relation to education. The authors clarify that the law is not only about safeguarding rights, but also about responsibilities toward others (p. 201). This notion of accountability makes the book appealing. The book also touches on consequences of breaking rules, in terms of student discipline measures and what schools have the right to do in bringing about order. It also illustrates guidelines under the *Education Act*.

The book is written in plain and natural language, free from legal jargon, making it easy for students to follow and understand. Another great strength of the book is the rich tools, resources and practical strategies it offers. The authors include court cases, comparative analysis from different provinces, a glossary of key terms, an explanation of how a Bill becomes Law, sample of how to write to a Member of Parliament and offer tips on how to advocate for one's rights. As this book is a free download (<https://www.aupress.ca/books/120281-the-law-is-not-for-kids/>), its greatest strength is that it is accessible to all students. My only critique is that some of the ideas put forth are a bit radical in terms of encouraging students to seek out certain rights. While many restrictions on legal rights are tied to the age of majority, not all are. For example, minors are legally allowed to consent to certain kinds of medical treatment, obtain a gun license, gamble (i.e., purchase a lottery ticket), apply for a name change, get tattoos and body piercing, and even obtain social assistance, depending on the province. If youth are not socially and cognitively mature, exercising these rights could be problematic.

The Law is (not) for Kids is a play on words, emphasizing that the law is in fact for kids, and that they should know and engage with understanding law and their rights. As the authors eloquently state, "the law is complicated partly because as societies evolve, so does the law...it is also complicated because it comes from more than one place" (p. 11). The greatest advice offered to students in making the law work for them is to **read** about the law and their rights, to **write** down key points, to **talk/share** with others information and learning, and to **demonstrate** through standing up for their rights. Being the first book of its kind in explaining Canadian law and the rights of children for the students tar-

get group, this book is a valuable resource for parents, students and teachers. Lecic and Zuker powerfully conclude their chapter as do I this review, with a profound statement for reflection, “we tend to take rights we have today for granted. Yet many of these rights are relatively recent: they weren’t always there. Someone – usually those who had been denied these rights – had to fight for them” (p. 246).