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# The Landlord Squats Back

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Segment Length: 7:40 minutes

## **Lesson Description:**

Do property rights matter in a civil society? Whose rights should be primary, those of a landowner or a squatter? In this video, John Stossel investigates the rise of squatter's rights and the nightmares faced by landowners who try to reclaim their property.

## **Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- Explain the difference between tenants and squatters
- Discuss what homeowners face in trying to remove a squatter from their property
- Analyze the implications of the government protecting squatters
- Assess the effectiveness of strategies used in resolving squatting disputes

## **Concepts & Key Terms:**

**Squatter:** A person who unlawfully occupies an uninhabited building or unused land without permission, often exploiting legal loopholes to remain.

**Eviction:** The legal process of removing a tenant or squatter from a property, typically due to non-payment of rent, violation of lease terms, or other breaches of tenancy agreements.

**Trespassing:** Entering someone's property without permission or legal right, often with the intention of occupying or using the property unlawfully.

## **Preview Activity:**

Distribute copies of the K-W-L worksheet to the class. Have students fill in the K and W sections. After showing the video, have students complete the L section and answer the questions at the bottom of the worksheet.

## **Viewing Guide:**

We recommend that teachers show the video segment twice: first to allow students to view the video and focus on the issues presented, and second to allow them time to complete the viewing guide. After they complete the viewing guide, allow students a few minutes to work in pairs to share and verify answers.

## **Answers to Viewing Guide**

- |               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1. lease      | 5. criminals |
| 2. possession | 6. victims   |
| 3. refused    | 7. landlords |
| 4. legal      |              |

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# The Landlord Squats Back

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## Viewing Guide

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Per \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** As you watch the video, fill in the blanks with the correct words.

1. The squatters didn't have a \_\_\_\_\_, but today, squatters just claim they do, go to a house, and take it over.
2. I realized I could go in as the squatter myself, gain \_\_\_\_\_ of the property.
3. He walked in with a backpack and he \_\_\_\_\_ to leave.
4. This wasn't his house. He has no \_\_\_\_\_ right to be there.
5. They are not homeless people. They're \_\_\_\_\_.
6. How do the squatters manage to think of themselves as \_\_\_\_\_?
7. But city politicians win elections trashing \_\_\_\_\_.

**Now, take a few moments to reflect on the video and answer the questions below:**

Do you think it's fair for a squatter to take possession of someone else's property?

Why/why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why might some landlords decide not to bother fighting back against squatters?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How do squatters justify their actions? Do you agree with their justifications?

Why/why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Discussion and Analysis**

1. What does it mean to be a squatter?
2. What are some challenges faced by homeowners who deal with squatters?
3. How do squatters manipulate laws to remain in homes?
4. Why do you think some cities have laws that favor squatters?
5. Think about something you own – a vehicle, your cellphone, a computer, anything that's yours and matters to you. Imagine you leave it alone for 5 minutes, and when you return, someone else claims a right to it. How would you feel? What would you do?
6. How might squatting impact the neighborhood? How might such incidents impact safety and property values?
7. What are the ethical concerns of squatting?
8. Why do property rights matter in a civil society? Are property rights declining in our society? Why/Why not? What impact might that have on society?
9. Do you believe squatters should have any rights to the properties they occupy? Why/Why not?
10. How might media coverage influence the public's perception of squatters?
11. How do squatters justify their actions to law enforcement?
12. How can homeowners protect their properties from squatters?
13. What reforms could be made to current laws to better deal with squatters?
14. Can you identify any unintended consequences of anti-squatting laws?
15. What alternatives exist for individuals facing housing insecurity instead of squatting?
16. What role might socioeconomic factors play in the prevalence of squatting?

## **Discuss These Lines from the Video:**

1. The squatters *didn't* have a lease, but today, squatters just claim they do, go to a house, and take it over. Bizarrely, laws favor the squatters.
2. I just felt like you know, if they can take a house, I can take a house.
3. He answered an ad to rent a room, and before he was accepted to rent the room, he walked in with a backpack and he refused to leave.
4. I'm not trying to gain anything. I'm a victim here.
5. The city still protects tenants whether they get a lease or not.

6. City politicians are so eager to favor tenants, they protect squatters.
7. They are not homeless people. They're criminals. They are people that are taking advantage of the system.
8. Still there, climbing through the window because she doesn't have access to the main house.
9. Maybe squatters listen to people like this New School professor, a self-described Marxist who calls landlords parasites.
10. Who do they think buys the land, pays lawyers to decipher the excessive regulations, hires architects, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, pays the taxes and manages the property?!
11. But city politicians win elections trashing landlords. And Laws are so anti-landlord that, homeowners sometimes get arrested if they change locks to get a squatter out!
12. Law enforcement can't even ask for the lease because they're not allowed to decipher if it's the real lease or not.

### **Quotes for Discussion:**

If a car owner called police to report that someone was sitting in their vehicle without permission, police would make a decision on the spot about ownership based on the registration and other documents. They would not allow the person to drive off and tell the owner to work it out in court. – Jonathan Turley

I think people need housing. And there's empty buildings, I think people should live in there. If you want to call them squatters, trespassers, hey, I call Wall Street thieves! – Al Lewis

This whole idea of squatting is a scam. The notion that you can just move into somebody's house, be there for 30 days, and all of a sudden be able to assert rights against the homeowner is a total farce. – Ron DeSantis

[Squatting] is obviously a local issue. [L]ocal government needs to make sure that they address this and they take action. – Karine Jean-Pierre

There is a law that says if a house is not inhabited, we can seize it. I think that will be my next business. Invading abandoned houses. – Leonel Moreno

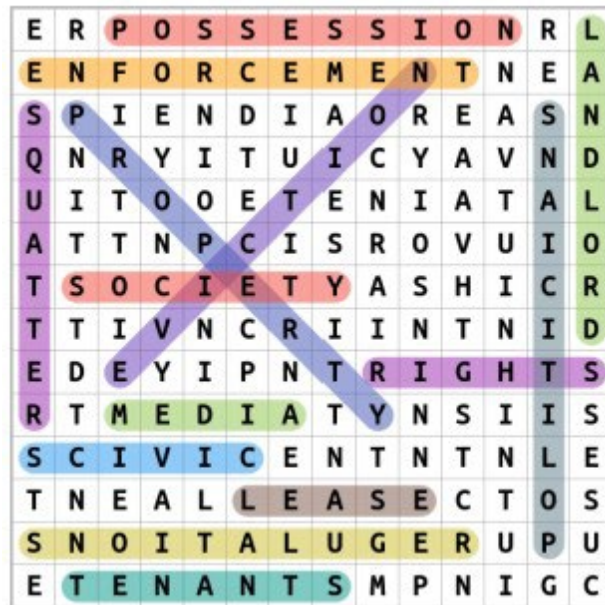
Our economic freedom is founded on individual property rights; government should never be permitted to take those away. – Ernest Istook

[T]he rights of persons, and the rights of property are the objects for the protection of which Government was instituted. These rights cannot well be separated. – James Madison

It is not property but the right to hold property, both great and small, which our Constitution guarantees. – Calvin Coolidge

## **Activities:**

1. Have students complete the K-W-L chart in class or for homework.
2. Have students complete the political cartoon activity in class or for homework.
3. Have students complete the Cloze activity in class or for homework.
4. Have students complete the Word Search activity in class or for homework.  
Answer key:



5. Interview a neighbor or family friend or relative who rents a house or apartment to someone. Does the owner worry that a tenant will stop paying rent? What does the owner think he or she will be able to do if the tenant stops paying rent?
6. Conduct a man-on-the street interview in which you ask people if they know what squatters are and how a property owner can legally remove them from his or her property.
7. Have there been any publicized cases of squatters in your town or a neighboring town? Research and write a summary about what has happened.
8. What are the laws regarding squatting (also known as adverse possession) in your town or city and your state.
9. Divide the class into two teams. One team will argue in favor of squatter's rights, focusing on the need for housing and protection under the law, while the other team defends homeowner rights and property laws.
10. Have students work in groups to create a stakeholder map on squatting. Students should identify all stakeholders—groups of people involved in or impacted by squatting. (Examples: homeowners, squatters, neighbors, law enforcement, the community, local and state governments. There might be other stakeholders, too.) Ask the students to analyze how squatting impacts each stakeholder. This activity encourages empathy and understanding of all groups involved. Here is a short video that explains stakeholder maps:

<https://youtu.be/HP2MZscvF18?si=61hfVy2XxqozjHk6>

11. Ask students to write an essay on squatting issues within their own community. They should research local laws, find news articles about squatting cases, and suggest solutions for balancing the needs of the homeless and property owners.
12. Assign groups to research and present the laws concerning squatting in different states or countries. Each group will explain the legal framework, notable cases, and the rationale behind these laws.
13. Have students write an essay discussing the ethical dimensions of squatting. They should consider situations where squatting might be seen as morally justifiable versus when it is not, encouraging critical thinking about the ethical implications.
14. Students will work in pairs to design a theoretical intervention plan to help homeowners recover their properties from squatters, based on strategies learned from the video and additional research. They must consider legal, ethical, and practical aspects, developing problem-solving skills.
15. Have students keep a journal for a week, reflecting on what home and property mean to them, and how their perspectives have changed after learning about squatting. This activity fosters personal connection to the issue and encourages empathy towards those affected by housing insecurity and those affected by loss of their property rights.
16. **Real Estate Tycoon: A Classroom Simulation Game:** In this engaging classroom activity, students will become "landlords" for a week. Each student or group of students will be given a fictional rental property to manage, complete with details about its location, and condition. Throughout the week, they will face various challenges such as maintenance requests, tenant disputes, and financial management tasks like calculating rent, taxes, and expenses for repairs. They'll make decisions on how to address these issues while trying to keep their tenants happy and their business profitable. At the end of the simulation, students will present a summary of their management experience, including the challenges they faced, the decisions they made, and what they learned about the responsibilities and work involved in being a landlord. This activity aims to dispel myths about landlords by providing insight into the complexities of property management and the effort required to maintain a fair, livable environment for tenants.
  - a. To play this game, print out the informational paragraphs that follow and give one to each group. If you need more, follow the lead of the existing informational paragraphs to create more. Also, feel free to adjust the costs if they are too out of line with prices in your area. Begin by having students do an analysis of the math – are they charging enough rent? How much profit are they making? For each challenge, have teams make a list of all the actions they must take to fix it. When challenges arise, do they have the money to cover the issues? If the tenant doesn't pay the rent, or the property is vacant, how do they pay the mortgage, insurance, etc.? What might happen if their property is vacant for several months?

1. Group 1: The property is a 3-bedroom, 2-bath house with 1500 square feet. It was purchased for \$200,000 with a monthly mortgage of \$950, monthly insurance of \$100, and yearly taxes of \$3,000. Rent charged is \$1,500 per month. Challenges include a furnace breakdown costing \$4,000 to repair, a plumbing backup costing \$1,800, and illegal subletting needing resolution.
2. Group 2: This 2-bedroom, 1-bath apartment spans 900 square feet. The purchase price was \$150,000, with a monthly mortgage of \$700, monthly insurance of \$80, and yearly taxes of \$2,500. Rent charged is \$1,200 per month. Challenges faced are tenant's failure to pay rent for one month, a cracked foundation requiring a \$5,000 repair, and tenant disputes over parking.
3. Group 3: A 4-bedroom, 3-bath home with 2000 square feet, bought for \$250,000. Monthly mortgage is \$1,200, insurance is \$120, and yearly taxes are \$3,500. The rent charged is \$1,800. The challenges include hot water heater failure (\$1,800 repair), fire damage (\$4,000 repair), and a gas leak (\$1,000 to fix).
4. Group 4: The property is a 2-bedroom, 2-bath condo of 1100 square feet, with a purchase price of \$160,000. The monthly mortgage is \$760, insurance \$90, and yearly taxes are \$2,800. Rent is \$1,300. Challenges include a roof leak (\$2,500 repair), neighbor disputes requiring fence repair (\$1,500), and a pest infestation costing \$600 to treat.
5. Group 5: A 3-bedroom, 1.5-bath house of 1400 square feet was purchased for \$190,000. The monthly mortgage is \$900, insurance \$95, and yearly taxes are \$2,900. Rent is \$1,400. Landlord challenges include a property tax increase of \$500, AC unit failure (\$3,500 repair), and electrical wiring issues (\$2,200 repair).
6. Group 6: This 1-bedroom, 1-bath apartment, 700 square feet, had a purchase price of \$130,000. Monthly mortgage is \$620, insurance \$75, and yearly taxes \$2,400. Rent charged is \$1,100. Challenges are tenant breaking lease early with property vacant for 2 months, mold removal costing \$3,000, and appliance theft requiring the replacement of a stove for \$1,000.
7. Group 7: A 3-bedroom, 2.5-bath townhouse with 1600 square feet was bought for \$210,000. The monthly mortgage is \$1,000, insurance \$110, and yearly taxes are \$3,100. Rent is \$1,600. Challenges include plumbing issues (\$1,500 repair), lost rental income due to a flood (\$3,000), and major appliance breakdown, fridge \$1,200.
8. Group 8: The property is a 4-bedroom, 2-bath family home of 1900 square feet, purchased for \$240,000. Monthly mortgage is \$1,150, insurance \$125, and yearly taxes are \$3,300. Rent charged is \$1,700. Challenges faced are legal fees for eviction (\$2,000), squatter in the property requiring legal advice (\$1,500), and vandalism repair costing \$1,500.

9. Group 9: This 2-bedroom, 1.5-bath duplex spans 1000 square feet, with a purchase price of \$155,000. Monthly mortgage is \$740, insurance \$85, and yearly taxes are \$2,600. Rent is \$1,250. Challenges include broken window from a storm (\$800 repair), sewer backup (\$2,000 repair), and tenant complaints about noise needing management.
10. Group 10: A 3-bedroom, 2-bath house with 1500 square feet, bought for \$200,000. Monthly mortgage is \$950, insurance \$100, and yearly taxes are \$3,000. Rent charged is \$1,500. Challenges include water damage from upstairs costing \$2,500 to repair, a neighbor dispute over a fence (\$1,500), and dealing with an illegal sublet.
11. Group 11: This 2-bedroom, 2-bath condo of 1200 square feet had a purchase price of \$165,000. Monthly mortgage is \$780, insurance \$85, and yearly taxes are \$2,700. Rent is \$1,350. Landlord challenges include an AC unit failure costing \$3,500 to repair, a plumbing backup costing \$1,800, and a pest infestation requiring a \$600 treatment.
12. Group 12: A 4-bedroom, 3-bath luxury home with 2100 square feet was purchased for \$260,000. Monthly mortgage is \$1,240, insurance \$130, and yearly taxes are \$3,600. Rent charged is \$1,900. Challenges faced are a cracked foundation requiring a \$5,000 repair, fire damage costing \$4,000 to repair, and a gas leak needing a \$1,000 fix.
13. Group 13: The property is a 1-bedroom, 1-bath apartment of 800 square feet, bought for \$135,000. Monthly mortgage is \$640, insurance \$70, and yearly taxes are \$2,300. Rent is \$1,150. Challenges include roof leak repairs costing \$2,500, electrical wiring issues needing \$2,200 in repairs, and dealing with an illegal sublet situation.
14. Group 14: This 3-bedroom, 1-bath house of 1300 square feet had a purchase price of \$185,000. Monthly mortgage is \$880, insurance \$90, and yearly taxes are \$2,850. Rent charged is \$1,450. Landlord challenges include property tax increase of \$500, mold removal costing \$3,000, and major appliance breakdown, with the fridge costing \$1,200 to replace.
15. Group 15: A 2-bedroom, 2-bath apartment with 1150 square feet, bought for \$170,000. Monthly mortgage is \$810, insurance \$88, and yearly taxes are \$2,750. Rent is \$1,400. Challenges faced are plumbing issues requiring \$1,500 in repairs, a sewer backup costing \$2,000 to fix, and tenant complaints about noise that need to be managed.
16. Group 16: The property is a 4-bedroom, 2.5-bath family home of 1800 square feet, purchased for \$230,000. Monthly mortgage is



\$1,100, insurance \$115, and yearly taxes are \$3,200. Rent charged is \$1,750. Challenges include legal fees for eviction (\$2,000), a broken window from a storm (\$800 repair), and a neighbor dispute requiring fence repair (\$1,500).

17. Group 17: This 3-bedroom, 2-bath house spans 1550 square feet, with a purchase price of \$195,000. Monthly mortgage is \$930, insurance \$98, and yearly taxes are \$2,950. Rent is \$1,500. Challenges are a furnace breakdown costing \$4,000 to repair, water damage from upstairs requiring a \$2,500 repair, and dealing with an illegal sublet situation.
18. Group 18: A 2-bedroom, 1-bath condo of 950 square feet was bought for \$150,000. Monthly mortgage is \$710, insurance \$77, and yearly taxes are \$2,500. Rent charged is \$1,200. Landlord challenges include tenant's failure to pay rent for one month, a roof leak costing \$2,500 to repair, and electrical wiring issues needing \$2,200 in repairs.
19. Group 19: The property is a 4-bedroom, 4-bath luxury home with 2200 square feet, purchased for \$270,000. Monthly mortgage is \$1,290, insurance \$135, and yearly taxes are \$3,700. Rent is \$2,000. Challenges faced are hot water heater failure costing \$1,800 to repair, fire damage requiring a \$4,000 repair, and a pest infestation needing a \$600 treatment.
20. Group 20: This 3-bedroom, 1.5-bath house of 1450 square feet had a purchase price of \$180,000. Monthly mortgage is \$860, insurance \$92, and yearly taxes are \$2,800. Rent charged is \$1,400. Landlord challenges include AC unit failure costing \$3,500 to repair, plumbing issues requiring \$1,500 in repairs, and dealing with vandalism that costs \$1,500 to fix.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## The Landlord Squats Back K-W-L Chart

**Directions:** Complete the **K** and **W** sections prior to watching the video. After you have seen the video, complete the **L** section and answer the questions below the K-W-L chart.

<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>L</b>
What I know about property rights and squatting...	What I want to know about property rights and squatting...	What I've learned about property rights and squatting...

Why are property rights important? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are the ethical implications of squatters taking over property? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Per \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## **The Landlord Squats Back**

### **Cloze Activity**

**Directions:** Read the entire passage first. Then fill in the blanks with words from the box.

politicians	cumbersome	strangers	court	criminals
years	police	utilities	squatters	take
	homeless		changed	

What if you come home and find \_\_\_\_\_ living in your house? I assumed you order the \_\_\_\_\_ out, and if they resist, call the police, and they will kick them out. I was wrong. Pro-tenant laws passed by anti-capitalist \_\_\_\_\_ now protect squatters.

"It's a civil matter," the police say. "Sort it out in \_\_\_\_\_." But court might cost \$20,000 or more, and eviction might take \_\_\_\_\_.

In my state, New York, it's even illegal for homeowners to shut off \_\_\_\_\_ to try to get squatters out.

"Squatter rights," also known as "adverse possession" laws, exist in all 50 states. As a result, evicting a squatter legally is so expensive and \_\_\_\_\_ that some people simply walk away from their homes!

Flash Shelton's mom wanted to sell their house after his dad died, but while they were selling it, squatters moved in. Shelton called the \_\_\_\_\_, who said there was nothing they could do. So he tried a new tactic: out-squat the squatter. "I just felt, if they can take a house, I can \_\_\_\_\_ a house," Shelton says. "I could go in as the squatter myself, [and] gain possession of the property."

When the home invader left for a few hours, Shelton went in and \_\_\_\_\_ the locks. Only then did the squatters leave.

"People think of squatters as \_\_\_\_\_, destitute," I say. But, Shelton says, they're not. "They're \_\_\_\_\_, people taking advantage of the system."

This Cloze Activity is based on the article "In My House!" by John Stossel.

<https://www.johnstossel.com/in-my-house-squatter-rights/>

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Per \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## The Landlord Squats Back

### Cloze Activity - ANSWER KEY

**Directions:** Read the entire passage first. Then fill in the blanks with words from the box.

politicians	cumbersome	strangers	court	criminals
years	police	utilities	squatters	take
	homeless		changed	

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"It's a civil matter," the police say. "Sort it out in court." But court might cost \$20,000 or more and eviction might take years.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Per \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## The Landlord Squats Back

### Word Search

**Directions:** Locate and circle the words listed below the grid. Words may be hidden horizontally, vertically, diagonally, forward, or backward.

E	R	P	O	S	S	E	S	S	I	O	N	R	L
E	N	F	O	R	C	E	M	E	N	T	N	E	A
S	P	I	E	N	D	I	A	O	R	E	A	S	N
Q	N	R	Y	I	T	U	I	C	Y	A	V	N	D
U	I	T	O	O	E	T	E	N	I	A	T	A	L
A	T	T	N	P	C	I	S	R	O	V	U	I	O
T	S	O	C	I	E	T	Y	A	S	H	I	C	R
T	T	I	V	N	C	R	I	I	N	T	N	I	D
E	D	E	Y	I	P	N	T	R	I	G	H	T	S
R	T	M	E	D	I	A	T	Y	N	S	I	I	S
S	C	I	V	I	C	E	N	T	N	T	N	L	E
T	N	E	A	L	L	E	A	S	E	C	T	O	S
S	N	O	I	T	A	L	U	G	E	R	U	P	U
E	T	E	N	A	N	T	S	M	P	N	I	G	C

Locate these words above:

**MEDIA**

**RIGHTS**

**POSSESSION**

**EVICTION**

**CIVICS**

**PROPERTY**

**TENANTS**

**REGULATIONS**

**SOCIETY**

**SQUATTER**

**POLITICIANS**

**LANDLORD**

**LEASE**

**ENFORCEMENT**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

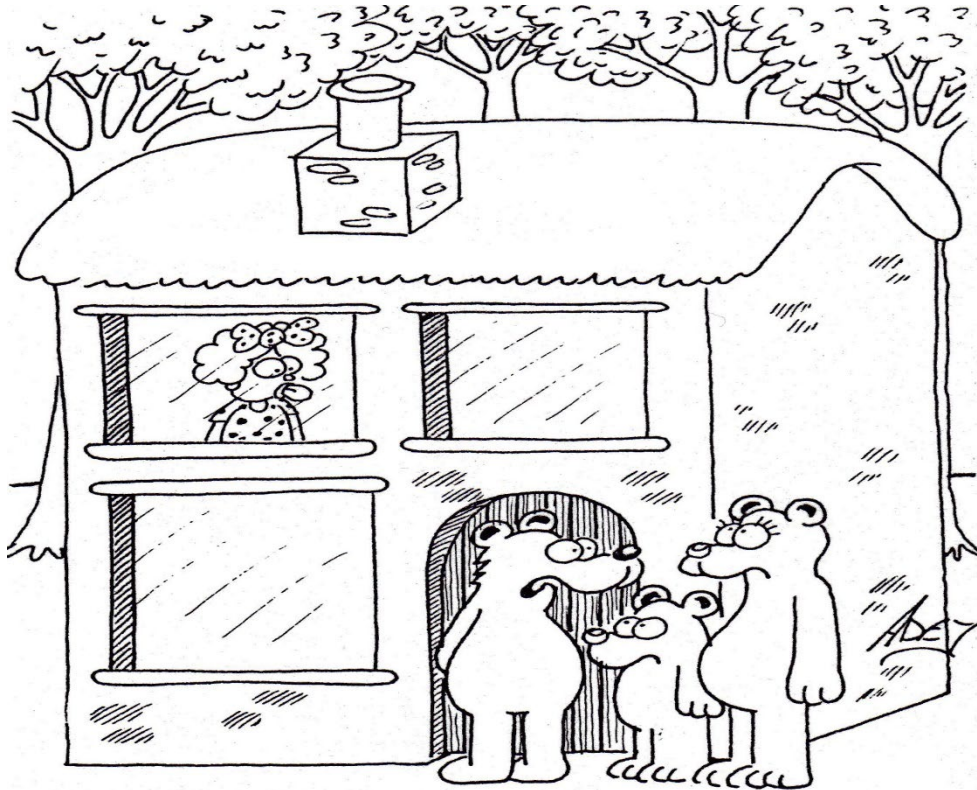
Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## The Landlord Squats Back

### Political Cartoon Activity

**Directions:** Use the political cartoon to answer the questions below. Please note: If you don't know the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, search online to find the story and the basic plot before you complete this activity.



“She says she’s got ‘squatters’ rights.”

CartoonStock.com

Briefly describe what is happening in the cartoon. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How does the cartoon relate to the video? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Imagine you are one of the bears. How would you feel about someone claiming to have “squatters’ rights” to your home? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_