***New Jersey v. T.L.O.* (1985)**

**Issue:** Privacy Rights at School

**Bottom Line:** Your Belongings Can Be Searched, But Not Arbitrarily

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| **Background**  | **Key Points / Facts** |
| T.L.O. (Terry), a 14-year-old freshman at Piscataway High School in New Jersey, was caught smoking in a school bathroom by a teacher. The principal questioned her and asked to see her purse. Inside was a pack of cigarettes, rolling papers, and a small amount of marijuana. The police were called and Terry admitted selling drugs at school.Her case went to trial and she was found guilty of possession of marijuana and placed on probation. Terry appealed her conviction, claiming that the search of her purse violated her Fourth Amendment protection against "unreasonable searches and seizures." |  |
| **Ruling** | **Key Points / Facts** |
| The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the school. Students have "legitimate expectations of privacy," the Court said, but that must be balanced with the school's responsibility for "maintaining an environment in which learning can take place." The initial search of Terry's purse for cigarettes was reasonable, the Court said, based on the teacher's report that she'd been smoking in the bathroom. The discovery of rolling papers near the cigarettes in her purse created a reasonable suspicion that she possessed marijuana, the Court said, which justified further exploration. |  |
| **Impact** | **Key Points / Facts** |
| T.L.O. is the landmark case on search and seizure at school. Basically, school officials may search a student's property if they have a "reasonable suspicion" that a school rule has been broken, or a student has committed or is in the process of committing a crime. These are called "suspicion-based" searches. There are also "suspicionless searches" in which everyone in a certain group is subject to a search at school.  |  |
| **Amendments** | **Other Research / Examples** |