**Before Reading**

1.Use the headings, sidebar and caption, (text features), etc. to write some questions that you think might be answered in the selection.

Title: **Is the Law Too Soft on Youth Crime?**

Do young people get away with murder? Why does the law treat young offenders differently from adults? Why should young offenders get lighter sentences? Despite what you might hear or read in the media, there are no simple answers to these questions. The roots of youth law are embedded deep in Canadian history.

Heading: **Youth Law in the Past**

Two hundred years ago, the justice system treated children over the age of seven just like adults. A 10-year-old child could he whipped, sent to prison, or even hanged for stealing a few potatoes.

Does this approach sound reasonable to you?

Well, it didn't to the reformers of the day either. They said there are good reasons for treating young people differently in the criminal justice system. First, young people lack the experience needed to understand the consequences of their
actions. Second, because they can be easily influenced, teens are often led into crime by adults whom they trust. Third, some young offenders may not have had the direction they needed to become responsible citizens. The
reformers also believed that more lenient sentences for young people just made sense. Most young offenders aren't "hardened" criminals. With guidance they can become productive citizens. The reformers thought that judges sentencing a delinquent youth should balance the need to punish with the goal of rehabilitation.

Heading: **Youth Law in Transition**

*The Juvenile Delinquents Act, 1908*, was the first Canadian law to grant young people specific rights By the 1960s, however, many politicians and concerned citizens felt that youth were still not receiving adequate legal representation and fair treatment under the law. So, in 1984, the *Young Offenders Act (Y.O.A.)* replaced the earlier Act. The Y.O.A. was significantly different in two respects. First, young offenders, those aged between 12 and 17, were guaranteed anonymity if charged with a crime. Second, youth were guaranteed a maximum sentence of three years for violent crimes, such as murder. Nearly 20 years later, the Act was revised again, mainly due to criticism that it was not tough enough. This revision led to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act, 2003.*

Heading: **Youth Law in the Present**

The stated goal of the new Act is the "long-term protection" of society. The Act recognizes that young people should have special rights under the law, but that they should also be accountable for their actions. To achieve both of these goals, the Act distinguishes between serious and less serious crimes.

Serious offences, such as murder and assault, are those that hurt other people. Less serious crimes are non-violent ones, such as vandalism. For less serious crimes, the Act says judges should sentence youths to something other than incarceration. If a youth vandalizes a park, for instance, then the sentence might consist of spending weekends cleaning up and revitalizing the park. For serious crimes, such as murder, young people can now be tried as adults, publicly named, and sentenced to a maximum of 10 years imprisonment for murder. Even in prison though, there is an emphasis on reform. The framers of the Act believed that reform is good for the offender and also ensures "the long-term protection" of society.

**Sidebar**

In 1997, 14-year-old Reena Virk was beaten to death by two teenagers in Victoria, B.C. The case received a lot of coverage in the media, leading many people to think that youth crime was on the rise. Statistically, the overall youth crime rate in Canada had been declining for five years.

**Fast Facts**

The *Youth Criminal Justice Act* lists 18 sentencing options that are available to a youth court judge. Seven of the options are new. These range from a reprimand to a prison term followed by a period of supervision.

**Questions**

2. You are preparing a report on the history of youth law in Canada. Using the information in the selection, identify the main ideas and details that you will use in your report. You can choose to organize your notes in the T-chart below.

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| --- | --- |
| Main Ideas | Details |
|  |  |

3. The title of this selection poses the question, “Is the law to soft on youth crime?” Using information from the selection, form your own conclusions to this question. Then select only evidence from the selection to support your conclusion.

|  |
| --- |
| Conclusion: |
| Supporting Evidence: |

4. Do you believe more changes are necessary to criminal youth law today? Explain your answer using information from this selection and your own ideas.

5. a) Effective readers use strategies to help them make sense of their reading (e.g., read more slowly). List any strategies you use.

b) Look back at the selection. Find a place in the selection where you used a reading strategy. Explain what you did and how it helped your understanding.