

Common Law-Related Education Strategies

Mock Legislative Committee Procedures

Teacher Instructions

After a bill is introduced into Congress (or your state legislature), it goes to a committee for consideration. If committee members decide to proceed with the bill, they usually hold a public hearing. At the hearing, testimony is given for and against it.

If you wish to have your students become familiar with committee hearing procedures, which are more formal than the procedures used for Youth Forums, the following simplified procedures will guide your efforts.

1. Assign students to roles:
 - a. One student will serve as the chairperson of the committee. The teacher may choose to serve as chairperson (or co-chairperson) to facilitate the committee hearing.
 - b. One student should be assigned to serve as the author of the bill, presenting an overview of the legislation. The author may choose others to serve as experts. For example, one student might role-play a doctor who works in an emergency room treating victims of abuse, and one might role-play a crisis counselor. Each expert will testify before the committee. (Lessons using mock legislative hearings often include several expert witness roles.)
2. After students have had time to prepare, conduct the legislative committee hearing, using the following simplified procedure.

Student Handout: MOCK LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURE

1. Committee chairperson will call the meeting to order: “The committee will come to order.”
2. Chairperson announces that there is one item on the day’s agenda (the proposed bill).
3. Chairperson calls on the bill’s author to explain the bill.
4. Author briefly explains the bill, states that there are witnesses who want to testify in favor of it.
5. Chairperson calls on those in favor of the bill to testify. These experts stand before the committee and each begins with “Mr./Madam Chair, members of the committee...” One by one, they explain their positions.
6. Chairperson asks for questions from the committee members. Anytime committee members wish to speak, they should say “Mr./Madam Chair” and wait to be called upon.
7. Chairperson asks if others would like to testify. At this time, students supporting or opposing the legislation may stand before the committee and one by one explain their positions.
8. Chairperson asks for questions from the committee members.
9. Committee discusses the bill. They may change the language of the bill by adding or deleting words. “I move to amend the bill by . . .” The amendment is then voted on separately. If it passes, it is incorporated into the bill.
10. A member of the committee moves for the bill to pass. “I move that the bill be recommended to pass”
11. Chairperson asks for those in favor of the motion to say “aye,” those opposed to say “nay.” The chairperson estimates the vote on each side and announces, “The motion prevails (or fails).” Any member may ask for a roll call vote, in which case the chairperson asks each member to register a vote on paper or by voice. The chairperson announces the vote.
12. Chairperson says “having no other items on the agenda, the meeting is adjourned.”

Alternative Steps 10 through 12: Lawmakers often conduct hearings without formally voting on the bills being discussed. In these cases, the hearing is ended after a discussion with the following language:

“Thank you for attending this hearing. We have heard much valuable testimony that we will consider in our discussion of the bills. This meeting is adjourned.”