

Guidelines for Conducting a Simulated Congressional Hearing

Overview

The simulated congressional hearing at the high school level represents a useful and practical way for teachers to evaluate the extent to which students understand the constitutional principles they have studied. By testifying in this type of hearing before a committee of community representatives, high school students will refine their oral presentation skills and develop a greater degree of self-confidence and self-assurance.

It is recommended that community organizations such as the PTA, service clubs, bar associations, or other professional groups serve as cosponsors for the hearing. These organizations can assist in many ways to make the hearing successful and, as a result, both the students and the school will receive positive recognition for the activity.

The guidelines listed below for the simulated hearing are intended to be flexible and teachers should not hesitate to modify them to meet the needs of their classes. Importantly, however, they provide the classroom teacher with an additional means of evaluating pupil performance and permitting students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge to parents, interested school staff, other students, and members of the community.

Procedures

1. State and/or congressional district coordinators are available to help organize hearings. (See the enclosed program brochure for a listing of state coordinators.)

2. Decide how the hearing will be conducted.

Hearing conducted before an audience. Under the most favorable circumstances, the hearing should be conducted in an auditorium or other facility that can accommodate an audience. Parents, members of the community, representatives of cosponsoring organizations, and other classes from the school may be invited to the hearing.

Hearing conducted in the classroom. If it is not feasible to conduct the hearing in an auditorium, it may be conducted in a classroom with a smaller number of people invited to observe the proceedings.

3. Have students prepare for the simulated hearing.

- a. After students have studied the entire curriculum, divide the class into six groups and assign each group to a different unit of the *We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution* text.

Note: If not all the units were taught, the number of groups can be reduced accordingly, and the hearing can be conducted on those unit topics covered during instruction.

- b. Distribute the hearing questions (included in this handbook) to each group.
- c. Students should prepare a four-minute presentation for each of the questions for their unit and be able to respond to follow-up questions from the committee for an additional six minutes.
- d. Students may use notes during their four-minute presentations and all students in each group should be encouraged to speak during the hearing.
- e. If possible, arrange for one or more outside experts to assist students in preparing their presentations. Subject matter experts and speech or debate specialists are recommended.

Note: The above guidelines are intended to be flexible and may be modified to meet the needs of individual teachers and their classes.

8. Invite members of the school community to the hearing.

Parents, school staff, and other members of the school community should be invited to hear the students' testimony.

9. Prepare Certificates of Achievement.

Students participating in the We the People... program earn Certificates of Achievement by passing the Test on the History and Principles of the Constitution and Bill of Rights and participating in the simulated congressional hearing. These certificates should be signed by the member of Congress or another prominent official.

A Certificate of Achievement is included with the instructional materials. The Center for Civic Education will provide additional certificates as needed and can also provide Certificates of Appreciation to be given to the adults who assist with the implementation of the hearing. To obtain these certificates call 800-350-4223 or write the Center for Civic Education.

10. Conduct the hearings.

- a. Distribute to each committee member copies of the Congressional Hearing Score Sheet to use in evaluating each group's testimony.
- b. If the hearing is held in a school auditorium or assembly room, arrange tables and chairs on the stage in a V shape with the open end of the V facing the audience. The committee members should sit along one arm of the V, and each group of students should be seated along the other arm when it is their turn to speak before the committee. If possible, a microphone should be provided for the committee members as well as for the students.

If the hearing is to be held in a classroom, arrange the room so that a set of chairs faces the committee, in a V shape if possible. These chairs are for the group which will be presenting to the committee; other students will remain at their desks.
- c. Introduce your member of Congress and any other dignitaries who are attending the hearing. In addition, the members of the cosponsoring organizations should be introduced and their contributions acknowledged.
- d. Introduce the committee members to the class. The initial introduction should identify committee members by their actual professions. After the introductions, however, the role-playing begins, and the committee members can be addressed as congressmen and congresswomen. One committee member may act as moderator during these introductions and throughout the hearings. The moderator may be addressed as the chair of the committee.
- e. Call the first student group forward and seat them in the chairs facing the committee. The moderator should introduce the students or allow them to introduce themselves.
- f. Have the chairperson state briefly the purpose of the hearing and the topic to be addressed. Students begin the hearing with a prepared statement in response to the designated question for their unit. The committee will ask follow-up questions which the students have not seen; they also may ask students to elaborate or to explain elements of their prepared testimony.
- g. In order to provide the same amount of time for each group, a timer should be appointed to see that the groups do not exceed the allotted time of four minutes for the prepared presentation and six minutes for the questioning period.
- h. After each group has testified on its topic, the congressional committee should give feedback to the students on their performance using the Congressional Hearing Score Sheet as a guide.
- i. Allow the group to return to their desks and call the next group forward.

Repeat steps e-i for all six groups.