

# We the People... Simulated Congressional Hearing

## What middle school students found helpful:

- **Assign roles.** We chose team captains in each class who then, with some guidance from the teacher, chose teams. It was stressed to the team captains the different skills each group needed and also that as a class they were a team. Captains, in private, took the class list and through discussion and taking turns chose teams. They also loosely assigned roles such as co-captain, risk-taker, etc. and communicated to their teammates why they had chosen them. They assigned each other specific roles as well such as editor, researcher, writer etc once the work began.
- **Color-Code Everything!** Each unit was its own color and when possible, handouts, resources and score sheets were copied in that color paper. Use the rainbow: ROYGBV Red: Unit 1, Yellow: Unit 2, Green: Unit 3, Blue: Unit 4, Purple: Unit 5, White: Unit 6 (That just happened to be the color paper our school stocks). Color-code the judges' materials as well. During the actual competition it is easier to figure out to whom the score sheets belong in case the judge forgets to write their name or unit on them. The colors also made it easier for students to identify the appropriate resources.
- **Communication is key.** Emailing speech to each other and getting edits from each other and teacher gave the whole endeavor a strong sense of community. We spent 3 weeks actually preparing for the competition and every minute was vital. Every night, I checked my email and students sent paragraphs, ideas and whole speeches which I edited for content, style and time. This was above and beyond what I assigned them to do in class and for graded homework.
- **Bookmark Websites.** Use the list of recommended sites and bookmark them on the computers at the school or on the school webpage. At least, give them to students in print form. Students used these a lot at home in addition to the computer lab time they had during school.
- **Score sheets can be used as a rubric.** Give these out and explain them to students as early as possible. Remind students to go back to the score sheets as they write and revise their speeches. Then go over the criteria again before you start the in class practices. Students need to be reminded that participation and responsiveness count as well as Constitutional application etc.
- **Competitive aspect.** Students developed such intrinsic motivation during the competition that teachers had to grade very little. We gave feedback on speeches and performances and gave grades for completion of tasks. 90% of the students went well above and beyond the work we assigned as they took true ownership of their group's performance. After each group started presenting to the class in practice rounds, students were motivated to help each other as a class team. There was some anxiety and teachers need to reinforce the learning aspect as opposed to the competitive aspect if it seems that they are getting overly anxious. Also, since their performance at competition was not tied to a grade, students' anxiety was relieved a little more.

- **Getting follow-up questions ahead of time to practice.** The single best way to prepare them was to type up the questions from the “Using and Review the Lesson” questions for each Unit. Students used these to grill each other and them selves on their knowledge of the unit. These are provided for you in the Teacher Resources. Stress that judges may ask ANY question and these questions are only for practicing answering on the spot.
- **Answering follow-up Q's in class as practice.** Students in other groups were in charge of asking questions for follow-up. This way, students listened to each other's speeches, saw what different groups did effectively, and gave each other meaningful feedback.
- **Where do judges get follow-up questions?** Students practiced with follow-up questions as indicated earlier but were still surprised when judges asked other questions. Teacher must emphasize that judges are allowed to ask anything they want within the scope of the unit.
- **More than one student can answer a question.** Students saw this first hand as they began practicing. Some teams had a signal system using body language to take turns answering questions.
- **Students can disagree with each other.** Some students were surprised to hear the other teams do this but emphasize to them that it is great to show both sides of an issue.
- **Build excitement!**
  - Lunch time pep rally to draw team names
  - Announce judges as they RSVP
  - Post the team names and a countdown calendar around the school
  - P.A. announcements
  - Enlist support of other team members and Administration.
  - 8<sup>th</sup> grade mini-assembly to go over dress code and expectations.

## Captain's Simulated Congressional Hearing Convention (A.K.A. How do we pick our teams?)

1. **Choose your units!** Work it out with your fellow captains.
2. **Choose a co-captain.** Pick someone reliable with whom you get along well. This person should compliment your strengths and weaknesses.
3. **Choose your teams** using the class lists, teacher recommendations, and the units your classmates signed up for.
4. Try to pick students who have signed up for your unit. But **team dynamics** are **very important** and in certain cases students may not get their top choice of unit.
5. Be sure **all teams** have **at least one** of the following **types** of students:
  - a. **Speaker/ Risk-taker.** Someone who is good at answering questions and can help the team by answering on the spot while others get their ideas ready.
  - b. **Writer.** This student needs strong writing skills, creative and clever use of language. They need to know how to incorporate multiple sources of information into the speech. Teacher recommendations will help with this.
  - c. **Researchers.** These students are good at finding current events, court cases, quotes and other background information for the speech and the team's general knowledge.
  - d. **Cheerleader.** Someone who has a positive attitude, gets along well with the other team members and can help the team through any disagreements or stressful times.

Keep in mind that you, as a captain, may fulfill one or more of these roles. You all have many of these qualities already. That is why your classmates thought so highly of you to choose you as a captain. Your goal is to pick teams that are balanced.

It is conceivable that your friend(s) may be on your team. But remember the ultimate goal is for the **class** to have **6 strong teams**.

*This is a starting point. As you all prepare and present, all students will research, write, edit, speak and answer questions. But you want a team where different students can use their strengths to help the team.*

*It is important to remember that **your teacher's comments** to you as well as **your discussions** with each other as you choose your teams are **confidential**. This is your first test as a captain. Please maintain the integrity of the job you were elected to do as well as the integrity of the Simulated Congressional Hearing.*