

Mock Trial

Overview:

This lesson allows students to form their own opinions about a scenario court case and support those opinions through the writing process. Students have the chance to act out a court trial as a fun way to present their writing.

Procedure:

Read a scenario that includes evidence and a suspect(s) of an event (this scenario could be based on a real trial that is appropriate for school or the teacher could write a meaningful scenario that relates to the students and their environment). Have a student or students volunteer to be suspects in the case. Ask students to form an opinion of the scenario and decide if the suspect is “guilty” or “not guilty.” Ask students to brainstorm why they have come to their opinion and ask them to use evidence or lack of evidence to support their opinion. Student “suspects” will write to describe why they are “not guilty.” Allow students to write a draft and then allow them to revise and edit their draft. Allow students to present their writing by reading their polished drafts in a mock court trial. Students with a “not guilty” opinion will present their writing as witnesses for the defense, while students with a “guilty” opinion will present their writing as witnesses for the prosecution. Student “suspects” will present their writing as a plea for the jury. Be creative! Ask important people of the school to be jury members, the court secretary, and the judge to make things more fun for the students. For a surprise ending, ask a school employee to run into the court with evidence that identifies the principal or another staff member as the true suspect!

Sample case scenarios are provided at the end of this document.

ASOLs Covered in this Activity:

5E--WP1b: The student will select an event or personal experience and use drawing, writing, or dictating to compose a message about it.

Extension Idea: Ask the students to listen to the court scenario and to make drawings or write notes related to any thoughts that are provoked by the scenario. Encourage students to dictate information about specific pieces of evidence that are particularly alarming or surprising about the scenario.

5E--WP1c: The student will add more information to own drawing, dictating, or writing to strengthen the message.

Extension Idea: Ask the students to take any notes, drawings, or dictations they have written about the scenario and share it with a peer. Have the students then add any other information that they may have thought about after sharing their own ideas and listening to the ideas of others.

5E--WP3a: The student will select a text and write an opinion about it and one reason to support the opinion.

Extension Idea: Based on the information they have written down about the scenario, ask the students to decide by their own opinion if the suspect is “guilty” or “not guilty.” Ask the students to complete a brainstorming worksheet to write at least one reason that supports their opinion of “guilty” or “not guilty.”

5E--WP3b: The student will select a topic and write about it including one fact or detail.

Extension Idea: Ask students to write on topic based on their opinion of “guilty” or “not guilty” to base that opinion on facts given from the evidence or scenario.

5E--WP6a: The student will use technology to produce and share writing.

Extension Idea: Record completed writing samples onto voice-output devices, PowerPoints, or cassette tapes/CD’s for students who are nonverbal and allow them to activate technology in order to share with others.

5E--WP7d: The student will plan by brainstorming and revise own writing by adding more information.

Extension Idea: Have students who believe the suspect is “not guilty” meet in one group, and students who believe the suspect is “guilty” in another group. Have each group brainstorm ideas that support their chosen opinion. Based on their brainstorming, allow students to add more information to their own individual writing.

5E--WP9b: The student will write to persuade by stating an opinion and provide reasons to support it.

Extension Idea: Remind students to include specific reasons that back up their opinion and to write with the jury in mind. Remind them that their writing will help persuade the decision of the jury.

5E--WE3a: The student will demonstrate capitalization by capitalizing the first word of a sentence when writing.

5E--WE3b: The student will use end punctuation, and correct spelling when writing.

Extension Idea: Instruct on proper capitalization, punctuation, and correct spelling. Ask students to use these tools while writing and to pay attention to these grammar rules when reading and revising their own writing. Allow students time to peer edit. For students who need more support, ask them where periods should go versus capital letters.

8E--WP3a: The student will write a persuasive report and support it with reasons or other relevant evidence.

Extension Idea: After students have brainstormed ideas and have written ideas that support their opinion, allow them to explore pieces of evidence and/or photographs that relate to the scenario. Ask them to add more information and reasons that support their opinion based on that evidence.

8E--WP5a: The student will write an argument to support a claim with one clear reason or piece of evidence.

Extension Idea: Allow the students who believe the suspect is “not guilty” to use creativity and write information related to an alibi that may persuade the jury of a “not guilty” verdict. For example, will the suspects “whereabouts” help prove he/she was not at the scene of the crime?

8E--WP5c: The student will produce writing that is appropriate for the task, purpose or audience.

Extension Idea: Ask the student who is the suspect to write with the purpose of explaining why he/she is “not guilty” with the jury as his targeted audience. Allow the student to use creativity to help describe reasons why he cannot be connected to the crime.

8E--WE3a: The student will use standard English rules when writing by using ending punctuation and capitalization when writing a sentence or question.

Extension Idea: Ask students to write at least two sentences in order to give them the opportunity to use capitalization and ending punctuation. Ask students to write a question that they would like to ask of the suspect. If any of the students are interested in being a lawyer in the mock trial, have them write a list of questions to ask the suspect while in court.

HSE--WP1a: The student will write about a personal opinion and give more than one reason supporting or rejecting the claim.

Extension Idea: After students have chosen an opinion of “guilty” or “not guilty,” and have had an opportunity to write reasons to support their opinion, have students pair up with others who have opposing opinions. Allow the pairs to explain their opinions and to debate why their reasons prove innocence or guilt.

HSE--WP1e: The student will develop writing by planning and revising own writing by adding more information.

Extension Idea: Once students have completed a first draft, enter new evidence and ask them to revise their own writing given the new evidence

HSE--WP5b: The student will develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, and rewriting.

Extension Idea: Offer a “writer’s workshop” period for students to meet with teaching staff to discuss their writing and to help edit and revise their writing.

HSE--WE1a: The student will use standard English rules by using correct punctuation when writing.

Extension Idea: Discuss the different types of punctuation used in writing. Ask students to look at a correct writing sample and highlight different types of punctuation in different colors by walking them through a punctuation hunt. Show an example of a writing sample that includes errors and ask the students as a group to help edit it by identifying incorrect or the absence of punctuation.

Materials Needed:

- A court trial scenario (real or teacher-made)
- writing utensil or alternative pencil
- brainstorming worksheet
- paper for rough draft and final draft (consider using fun paper that looks like a court document)
- evidence or photographs of the “crime scene” (Don’t forget to “enter” evidence during court!)
- consider including props for the mock trial including costumes, a gavel, etc.

Instructional Setting:

- Classroom
- Consider utilizing a different room like an auditorium for the mock court trial

Community Connections and/or Peer Interaction:

After the writing assignment, students share their writing in the mock court trial. Invite peers to view the trial or participate as lawyers or jurors who ask questions or make comments. Ask peers to form

their own opinions and vote if they think the defendant is guilty or not guilty. Promote discussion between students and their peers based on their opinions.

Functional Activity/Routine:

Organize a classroom discussion to discuss opinions on the case. This may give students opportunities to communicate and brainstorm more thoughts, and to revise their writing.

Strategies to Collect Evidence:

Include the student's brainstorming, rough draft, and final draft along with a detailed anecdotal record that includes a description of how they presented/shared their writing with others. Make sure to include prompts given. If your student is a scribbler or in one of the other early stages of developmental writing, be sure to include an interpretation of the writing in your anecdotal record.

Specific Options for Differentiating this Activity:

-Allow students to use their preferred "pencil" to complete this activity. This may include a writing utensil, keyboard, alternative pencil, or dictating to a scribe.

-A student in any of the developmental stages of writing can complete this activity.

*If your student is a scribbler, be sure to reinforce his/her product as authentic writing, and if necessary, help assign meaning.

Scenario 1: "The Case of the Missing Cookies"

It was a typical afternoon at the middle school. Students were packing up their things to get ready to go home, teachers were tidying up their classrooms, and Mrs. Carole was busily preparing meals for tomorrow's school lunches in the cafeteria. She had just pulled a tray of hot cookies from the oven when she remembered that she had forgotten to put some ingredients away. She set the cookies down to cool and gathered her cold ingredients to bring into the back of the kitchen where the refrigerator was. As she was back there she heard one of the kitchen doors squeak open and then slam shut a few seconds later. She didn't think much of it because she thought it was one of the other cooks. When she returned to put her cookies away for the next day, the tray was empty. All of the cookies were gone! She looked around the cafeteria. She noticed the principal (or you could choose a student's name) swiftly leaving the cafeteria. She also noticed a group of students (fill in the names of students) giggling right outside of the cafeteria. The rest of the cafeteria and kitchen were empty except for a few crumbs leading out of the cafeteria doors...

Scenario 2: "The Case of the Missing Tests"

It was the end of the semester at the High School. Mrs. Smith was just entering her rowdy classroom, prepared to hand out midterm tests. Mrs. Smith greeted her students as she usually did and asked them to take their seats. She noticed a group of girls (name students here) giggling and pointing at her. She thought it to be a bit odd, but placed her briefcase on her desk to get down to business. She reached into her briefcase to pull out the tests and felt it was empty. The tests were gone! A boy in the front row (student's name here) mockingly asked, "What's wrong Mrs. Smith?! Are you unprepared today?" Mrs. Smith was stunned! She remembered making copies of the tests earlier that morning and remembered placing them in her briefcase. Where could they be? Did they fall out or were some of her students trying to get out of taking their tests????