

CLASS 1
INTRODUCTION AND LIST OF RESOURCES

I. Introduction

The first class is an opportunity to introduce yourselves to the students, explain what you are going to do in future classes, describe any field trip you have planned, and introduce concepts pursued in detail in future classes. These new ideas are then incorporated into a short activity to further engage the students and prepare them for the role-playing and creative thinking they will be asked to undertake in subsequent classes.

It also is an opportunity to size up the abilities and temperament of the class. Even with the same teacher and the same grade, we have found a wide disparity among the classes from year to year. Likewise, it is a chance to gauge the teacher's level of commitment to the program and his or her ability to help you manage the class. Remember, 6th graders are a lively bunch, and they will often surprise you both with their enthusiasm and their unruliness.

We suggest bringing as many of the lawyers to the first class as possible, so that they become familiar to the students, and so that they can better assess the class for their future presentations. We have found it helpful to give each person from the firm some section of the introductory outline to present. In addition, during the class activity one or two firm members are assigned to each group of 5 students to help the students understand the issues and keep them on task.

The class activity is to have the students role-play different interests before an Environmental Board regarding the disposal of household and medical waste. The two options the Board is considering are to landfill the waste or to incinerate it. The Class is divided into 5 groups with different interests and given a short time to analyze and prepare their positions. Then a student from each group must present their arguments to the Board. At the end of the presentations, the Board issues its decision.

For the activity we have had the class leader play the role of the Environmental Board and ask questions of the student presenters. As there is no wrong or right answer, any decision is fine. However, we've leaned towards a compromise solution that splits the difference (for example, declaring that the Hospital has to burn its medical waste, and that it can landfill the less harmful remainder). This exposes the students to the nuances of the law and shades of grey that make up most policy decisions. It also keeps any group from being an outright losing side. However, if one group performs exceptionally well, we also try to reward that side with a favorable decision (it's always good to provide a short critique of each groups' argument, praising their good points and pointing out what they could have done better or the weakness of their side before issuing the decision). The ruling provides a good platform for discussing the power of advocacy and the workings of the judicial system.

Tips:

- Make and wear name tags. They can be re-used for future classes.

- Agree ahead of time to a convention on referring to each other. While some people may find it awkward, the school/teachers appear to prefer referring to adults by last name. Regardless of which route you take, it is good to decide ahead of time whether to be formal or informal.
- Confirm the first class with the teacher and principal the day before, to remind them you are coming.
- Arrive early - usually there is a little bit of bureaucracy with signing individuals in and finding the classroom.
- Suggest to the teacher that the students make name tags to tape to their desks before the first class.
- Be flexible - classes never go exactly as planned. Be ready to cut sections out of the outline, or shorten discussions considerably.
- Be conscious of the need to manage the class. While it is encouraging to be bombarded with questions from a group of enthusiastic youngsters, move things along when questions become unfocused.
- Encourage the student that will present their group's arguments to write down their arguments and look at the panel when presenting. Some students that you think will shine in the limelight turn out to crumble under the pressure of public speaking. Try to prep them as much as possible (in 30 seconds!) and offer them plenty of encouragement both during and afterwards.

II. Resources

Because the class is an introduction to broad principles and a preview of the concepts in future classes, the resource sections for the Overview and Classes 2-7 are all relevant.

If time constraints limit the amount of preparation, the most useful resource would be the EPA's website:

- General - www.epa.gov
- Air - <http://www.epa.gov/ebtpages/air.html>
- Acid Rain - <http://www.epa.gov/ebtpages/airairpolacidrain.html>
- Water - <http://www.epa.gov/ebtpages/water.html>
- Solid Waste - <http://www.epa.gov/ebtpages/wastes.html>
- Recycling - <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/muncpl/recycle.htm>