



Persuading Policymakers

Overview

In this lesson, students learn about public hearings and how students can make effective presentations at these hearings. First, students read about public hearings. Then they role play a school board and people appearing before it attempting to persuade policymakers on a hypothetical issue.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain what a public hearing is and identify several examples of public hearings.
- Analyze a policy using a rubric.
- Make a persuasive presentation on a policy issue.

Preparation & Materials

- [Handout A: Fact Sheet on Public Hearings](#)—1 per student
- [Handout B: Proposed New Policy](#)—1 per student
- [Handout C: Role Instructions](#)—1 per student
- [Handout D: Tips for Presenting at a Public Hearing](#)—1 per student
- Stopwatch or timer
- Markers and paper for signs

Procedure

I. Focus Discussion—Fact Sheet on Public Hearings

A. Tell students that when you are trying to influence a public official to favor or oppose something, it's called "lobbying." Citizens lobby in many ways. For example, they:

- Write a letter.
- Sign a petition.
- Call elected officials to express concerns and suggest solutions.

B. Tell students that another way to lobby is by speaking at public hearings. Distribute [Handout A: Fact Sheet on Public Hearings](#) to each student. Ask students to read the handout to find out about the different kinds of public hearings.

C. When they finish reading, hold a brief discussion by asking:

- How are judicial hearings different from legislative and executive hearings?
- What types of public hearings have you been to or seen on television/movies?
- Why do you think hearings are open to the public?
- Why do you think that members of the public are allowed to speak at many hearings?

D. Tell students that they are going to get an opportunity to practice speaking at a public hearing by taking part in a role play.

II. Reading and Discussion—Proposed New Policy

A. Tell students that they are going to role play residents of Central Heights and that the school board has developed a new policy. Distribute [Handout B: Proposed New Policy](#) to each student. Tell students to read it and that later they will be using GRADE (which is also on the handout) to evaluate the proposed policy.

B. Hold a brief discussion on the proposed policy.

III. Preparation for Role Play—Role Instructions

A. Choose seven students to be members of the school board committee and divide the

rest of the class into supporters and opponents of the policy. Distribute to each student [Handout C: Role Instructions](#) and [Handout D: Tips for Presenting at a Public Hearing](#).

B. The “school board” students will anticipate the arguments and prepare questions while the supporters and opponents will work on their presentations. (If the groups are too large, break the supporters and opponents into smaller groups and allow one person from each group to present to the board.)

C. Help the school board committee arrange chairs for the presentation. Give the Timer the stopwatch. Distribute markers and paper to the sign makers.

IV. Role Play—Public Hearing

When the class is ready, ask the Chair to call the meeting to order and the Vice Chair to get the speakers to sign up. Allow the Chair to run the meeting.

V. Debrief

A. Ask students:

- What were the best arguments made? What made them good?
- What tips would you give to someone who was going to talk at a public hearing?
- Are there opportunities to speak about the issue you are working on? (Encourage students to find out and to see if there are hearings on other issues of interest.)
- Why is it important for people to know about public hearings?

B. After completing this lesson, have students return to the Citizenship Brainstorm, identifying and adding to the lists.