

TEACHING TOOLS: NYS UNIFIED COURT SYSTEM

HIGH SCHOOL INTRODUCTION

This set of four projects was developed to create a series of teaching tools for high school students in grades 9 through 12. Drawing on concepts from the core curriculum, with a particular focus on Social Studies Standards 1, 4 and 5, these activities were created to help enhance the education of students who have already developed an understanding of and appreciation for the role of justice and the judiciary in our society. These projects are meant to teach students how to recognize the concepts of justice, fairness and due process in our laws and rules, as well as to teach them how to apply these concepts in their dealings with other individuals or groups. In an effort to address the more sophisticated Senior year curriculum, several of the activities encourage students to become aware of the economic precepts that are inherently connected to our concepts of justice and fairness.

1. "Justice and the Jury Experience"
This project is intended to foster an appreciation for the jury system in the United States. The combination of these exercises provides an historical overview of the jury system, as well as an opportunity to critique the jury system as we know it. Sample factual scenarios permit the students an opportunity to deliberate toward a unanimous verdict, which will foster an appreciation for the dynamics of group decision-making and the task that the justice system faces. Finally, with all that they have learned in mind, the students will have the opportunity to view and analyze the popular movie, "Twelve Angry Men."
2. "Mock Trial: United States v. Captain Quog & Fresh Oil Corporation"
This project provides an interdisciplinary approach to the legal process and an opportunity for older students to teach younger students about the important civic duty of jury service. A fact pattern and several witness statements provide the basis for a mock trial regarding an environmental disaster that had major economic consequences. If class location permits, high school students may conduct a jury selection exercise, ideally using information they learned during "The Jury Experience" activities to educate the younger student jurors about the process. The mock trial is to be conducted in front of the younger students or in front of peers, who will then deliberate with the help of the teachers. The trial and jury deliberation process provide a valuable lesson to all of the students involved, and the participatory nature of the various activities emphasizes the opportunities for participation in the justice process.
3. "Student Infomercial: Student Rights and Responsibilities"
This project is designed to teach students about the privileges they enjoy and duties that they owe as students in the State of New York. The first exercise will help familiarize students with the various laws, rules, and policies that govern education in New York, with an acknowledgment of the economic implications inherent in the education system. The students will analyze and propose amendments to policies of their school that directly affect them. Perhaps with the assistance of a communications expert, the students will design and conduct a survey of issues that concern classmates and community members. Using the results of the survey, the students will design an infomercial or presentation to discuss the issues, survey

findings, and develop a proposed solution. At the teacher's discretion, the infomercial may be presented to the school board or administration for consideration.

4. "Judicial Independence"

This project will allow students to compare and contrast New York's elective versus appointive methods of judicial selection. Students will research and debate whether one method is preferable over the other. Students may also have the opportunity to see the process in action in a local judicial election. Appendix materials provide primary sources for students to review if they are interested in reading an opinion that reflects judicial independence or in reading some of the provisions that govern the conduct of New York State judges.

We hope that each component will prove useful in educating students regarding the legal system, and that teachers will choose to use all or part of these materials to implement the lessons mandated by the Social Studies core curriculum.

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