

Lesson Planning Ideas for Judges and Lawyers

Whenever possible, try to involve the students in interactive learning activities. Conducting a mock trial with the students will teach them much more about how courts operate than a lecture on the structure of the courts. Role-playing a police stop is a far better way to teach about police powers than reading the opinion in *Terry v. Ohio*.

What Are the Essential Elements of a Good Civic Learning Lesson?

The lesson should:

- develop substantive knowledge about a legal/constitutional concept that is of interest to young people;
- present a balanced view of the topic as well as the legal system;
- develop a wide range of cognitive and affective behaviors, as well as critical thinking skills;
- stress interactive learning processes such as small-group activities;
- provide a debriefing procedure that leads participants to evaluate their own learning; and
- relate to students' daily lives and be appropriate to the students' ages and levels of understanding.

What Are the Steps of a Good Civic Learning Lesson?

1. Have at least one activity during the main lesson other than you talking (see the ideas below). You might want to use a number of different activities during the class (for example — start by asking a question, then move on to a role-play or simulation, have the students brainstorm some ideas, ask them to visualize a scene, read a passage from a case and close with a survey you provide).
2. End with a wrap-up, something that brings closure to the presentation. You might simply ask them to reflect on the lesson. If the teacher thinks a homework assignment is a good idea, give the students an assignment such as this: "Here's the address of your senator — write the senator and explain how you feel about _____."

Activities that Help Students Attach Meanings to Learning Experiences¹

- **Writing Logs/Diaries** — Students document reactions to events and interpret what happened.
- **Naming Themes** — Students think of a personal lesson that was learned and try to derive an abstract meaning from the experience. The question, "What does it remind you of?" encourages students to find themes.
- **Imagining** — Students imagine "What if?" or create alternative outcomes.
- **Evaluate** — Students rate or rank an experience in relationship to other similar experiences they may have had.
- **Role-Playing** — Students express their understanding of problems by acting out their interpretations of the elements of the experience (mini-mock trials are great for presentations).
- **Drawing** — Students identify major themes or issues and draw pictures identifying the meaning derived from the experience.
- **Comparing** — Students relate reading or taking a field trip to another similar experience. This helps them identify features they consider relevant.
- **Concept Mapping** — Students visualize and draw the relationships among concepts with a series of links or chains.

1. James Roth. "Enhancing Understanding Through Debriefing." *Educational Leadership*. October: 1987. pp. 24-27