

ADVOCACY GUIDE: RESOURCE 14

Activity Examples: Advocacy Simulations

Student experiences with advocacy vary widely. Those who are regularly exposed to advocacy speaking situations are often personally impacted by inequities or they are allies who are passionate about civic engagement and helping others.

While simulations are a limited tool for mirroring the real world, they can provide a starting point to expose all students to advocacy situations. These ideas are intended as introductory activities to get conversations started and peak student interest in becoming more deeply involved in helping people have a voice. These are not daily activities, but instead might take place over a whole week to allow for both preparation and extensive debrief discussions, so students understand the distinctions between the simulation scenario and what people actually go through in life. These debriefs can also be a good opportunity for students to address their own privilege and how they might approach future situations differently. With more time, it can be valuable to pair a simulation with the “Untold Stories” activity to balance the imaginary with real people.

What is the purpose of these activities?

1. Students research, present, and justify opinions and recommendations in service of advocating for people in need of support.
2. These activities can be done as a ramp up to a more involved group project or advocacy presentation or as a way of inspiring deeper discussions about advocacy.

How do these assignments connect to Common Core Speaking & Listening Standards?

- Regardless of grade level, the anchor standards for “Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas” require students of all ages to “Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.6).
- **Anchor standards for all ages do not specify any requirement to develop oral communication skills to advocate for issues and special needs.**
- The anchor standards for each grade level articulate the skills required to build on talk in conversations and discussions, present ideas and stories clearly, and organize ideas supported by research. While these are all useful in the context of advocacy, advocacy itself should also involve the development of perspective-taking skills and empathy, as well as the capacity for social and emotional learning. It is recommended to think about advocacy in the context of social and emotional learning standards as well as the Common Core.

What do these assignments look like?

- IEP Role Plays:** Before doing the role play, students are introduced to the purpose of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting and the history of their role in serving the needs of people with disabilities. Have a discussion about why students with special needs would be underserved without the opportunity to advocate for themselves, but also what would make this experience go wrong or differently than intended.
- After the discussion and introduction, select 4-6 students to engage in a role play of an IEP meeting for the entire class. Give each student a slip of paper with an assigned role in the meeting. To save time, search for “IEP role play script” for descriptions of different roles (the University of North Carolina Wilmington option is a good one).
 - Example roles: Student in Special Education, Special Education Teacher, General Education Teacher, School Psychologist, Special Education Director, Parent or Family Member
 - Secretly tell each student how “powerful” to be in the meeting and how much to speak -- make it so that the student and parent speak significantly less than the school psychologist and special education director.
 - Conduct an IEP meeting with each student in the assigned role. Afterwards, have a discussion about who was most powerful, how they could tell, and how they would make it different.
 - As a follow-up, divide the entire class into groups of 4 and have them all do IEP meetings that represent the ideal situation. For a deeper, more meaningful exercise, have people in the student role speak about real needs that they have in the academic setting so that they can practice advocating for true situations.

School Board Meeting: This activity is a way to practice for the real-world “public comment” section of any school board meeting. The day before this simulation, assign 5-7 students to the role of school board members, who set the agenda of what educational issues they will hear during the meeting and announce them to the rest of the class. Depending on how much preparation the remaining students get, this announcement can come one day or even one week before the simulation.

- Divide the remaining students into groups of 6 and assign them different community interest roles (i.e. parent advocacy group, teachers union, youth leaders, members of local community groups). Each group works together to prepare two-minute remarks that communicate their position on each agenda item.
- During the simulation, the school board members announce each agenda item and ask for public comment. Each interest group goes up to deliver their remarks related to the agenda item. School board members maintain a strict two-minute time limit for each set of remarks and can follow up with questions beyond the two minutes.
- For an easier version of this activity, think about other types of meetings that students might be more familiar with (or even create something wacky and completely imaginary!) The idea is just to get them to prepare a short set of remarks that advocate for the needs of a particular audience under limited time constraints. The benefit of the school board meeting is that students get exposed to a real-world scenario that directly pertains to their experiences in school.

Untold Stories: In this activity, students act like “investigators” or reporters who create long-form documentaries and journalism pieces highlighting untold stories in their community. Working individually or in groups, students interview real people about their experiences with inequity, discrimination, or prejudice.

- Each investigator creates an interview protocol to better understand and analyze the conditions that affect the well-being of people in their community.
- After students have completed their interviews, they pretend like they are on a documentary-based TV show by recording the voiceover audio of the story of their person. While this activity can become part of a bigger project involving media or a documentary, the benefit of only focusing on the voiceover audio is that it allows students to think purely about their public speaking and how they are telling the story. Otherwise, the risk is that they get overly caught up in the visuals and media.
- As a longer extension to this project, students can get into groups that each focus on a different story that was told. This focal story then becomes the inspiration for a participatory action research project, where they actually create projects that aim to make a difference for people who face the issues described in the story.

