

HANDS-ON



LEVELS: middle school and high school
SUBJECTS: civics and law
TIME: one class period

LAW AND ORDER



NOTE: To prepare for this exercise, you will have to collect several articles on four to five criminal cases.

By reviewing reports of several criminal cases, students will read the newspaper closely and critically and discuss some of the fundamental issues of the legal system.

Divide the class into four or five groups. Give each group articles about one criminal case. Ask them to review the articles and prepare a group report (two to three pages) that answers the questions listed below. (If necessary, ask students to conduct further research in the library.)

1. What is this case about? (Briefly describe the crime, charges, legal issues, verdict, and sentence.)
2. Does the group agree with the verdict? Why or why not? What would your group's verdict be?
3. Why do you think the defendant(s) did or did not commit the criminal act?
4. How does the verdict serve society? What stake do we have in seeing the lawbreaker punished?
5. After reviewing this case, do you think that some parts of our legal system should be changed? If so, which parts?

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LEVELS: middle school and high school
SUBJECTS: social studies and language arts
TIME: 30 minutes

SILENT SOCRATES



In deliberation, the listener plays as important a role as the speaker does. The citizen who asks the question is as important to the process as the citizen who answers the question. Think of the students in Wilson High School's Teen Court. Their questions and observations helped fill in the story told by the young defendant.

The object of this exercise is to write perceptive questions—questions that will draw out information and help probe deeper into the issue. This form of questioning is not an adversarial model; it's a model of discovery. This exercise is useful for helping students develop analytical and critical thinking skills.

Divide the students into pairs and ask them to engage in a silent Socratic dialogue about Teen Court. Pose a hypothetical case wherein a student has been caught cheating, plagiarizing in class, or destroying school property and has been referred to Teen Court. The jury has sentenced the student to 200 hours of community service. Is this fair?

Start the process by having each student write for two minutes to complete the following:

- "My initial reaction to this Teen Court procedure is _____ because _____."
- Swap papers. Have each partner write two perceptive questions that they would pose as a juror. Make sure that these questions are designed to help the partner delve into the issue more critically.
- Return papers and allot two minutes for responses.
- Switch papers for two more questions.
- Return papers and allot two minutes for responses.
- Switch papers for two more questions.
- Return papers for final responses.

Report the results to the class and discuss the interchange that occurred. Note the role that collaboration played in students' dialogues and how essential it is to ask the right questions when deliberating important issues.

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