

How can legislators help to prevent harm in a community?

Congressional Oversight Simulation



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LEARNING BY
HEARINGS

How can legislators help to prevent harm in a community?	
Key Concepts	Congressional oversight, legislative powers, checks and balances, separation of powers
Content Standards	<p>MI Civics – 6.3.1 Explain the personal dispositions that contribute to knowledgeable and engaged participation in civic communities.</p> <p>MI Civics – 6.3.2 Explain how informed members of society influence civic life.</p> <p>MI Civics – 6.4.1 Explain and evaluate how people, individually or collectively, seek to bring the United States closer to its Democratic Values.</p> <p>MI Civics – 6.4.2 Identify, discuss, and analyze methods individuals and/or groups have chosen to attempt social and legal change. Assess the effects of civil disobedience, social movements, demonstrations, protests on society and law.</p> <p>MI Civics – 6.4.3 Identify and describe a local, state, national, or international public policy issue; research and evaluate multiple solutions; analyze the consequences of each solution and propose, defend, and take relevant action to address or resolve the issue.</p> <p>MI Civics – 6.4.4 Equip students with the skills and knowledge to explore multiple pathways for knowledgeable, civic engagement through simulations and/or real-world opportunities for involvement.</p>
Assessment	Using a digital creation tool (Google Slides, PowerPoint, Canva, etc.) students will create a Public Service Announcement to inform the public about the outcomes of the Oversight Hearing.
Extension/Taking Informed Action	<p>Brainstorm some issues in your school that you think require an oversight investigation. In small groups, answer the following prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What questions do you want answered about this issue? - Who would you like to speak with about this issue? - When and where would you conduct a public hearing about this issue?

Required Supplies/Materials:

Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simulation scenario QFT and article (one for each student) • Chart paper or notebook paper • Highlighter or marker in two different colors (one for each small group) • Pen/pencil for each student
Day 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Witness summaries (one for each student) • Witness placards to hang around the room • Stickers or markers for “Hot Dot” activity • Legislator preparation worksheet (one for each legislator) • Witness background (one for each witness) • Witness preparation worksheet (one for each witness) • Access to computers for research (optional) • Pen/pencil for each student
Day 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee rules to review as a class • Committee hearing note catcher (one for each legislator and chair) • Reporter worksheet (one for each reporter) • Witness worksheet (one for each witness) • Pen/pencil for each student

Day 4

- Deliberation worksheet (one for each legislator and chair)
- Reporter worksheet (one for each reporter)
- Witness worksheet (one for each witness)

Suggested Pacing: Four consecutive 60-minute periods

Lesson Sequence

Period 1

1. Students should work in pairs or small groups with the **scenario QFT** to conduct the Question Formulation Technique (created by [The Right Question Institute](#)). The QFT Protocol has five main steps:
 - Read the document **(3 min)**
 - Ask questions using the following four guidelines. **(3 min)**
 - Ask as many questions as you can.
 - Do not stop to discuss, judge, or answer the questions.
 - Write down every question exactly as it is stated.
 - Change any statement into a question.
 - Share the questions. **(3 min)**
 - Highlight open-ended questions in one color and closed-ended questions in another. **(3 min)**
 - Open-ended questions are questions that can be debated or need a longer response.
 - Closed-ended questions are questions with a simple yes/no or one-word answer.
 - Flip the questions – Change one open-ended question from your group to be closed-ended and one closed-ended question to be open-ended. **(3 min)**
2. Tell students that there has been a scandal and that it is going to be their responsibility to get to the bottom of what happened. Pass out the **simulation scenario** and allow everyone in the class time to read the article. Discuss briefly some of the main points. **(20 min)**

Period 2

1. Pass out the **witness summaries** to all students and give them time to review or read as a class. Students will now decide on which six witnesses to call during the hearing based on these summaries using the [“Hot Dot” voting method](#). Tell students that they each have six votes for the witnesses that they think will provide the most insight and facts during the hearing. Hang up the **witness placards** around the room and give students time to place their votes on the person they want to be called as a witness. After everyone has voted, the six placards with the most votes will be your witnesses. **(10 min)**
2. Divide students into pairs or small groups for each of the roles.

To run the simulation, you will need:

- 1-2 committee chairs
- 8 legislators
- 6 witnesses

Since most classes are larger than 16 students, we recommend assigning students to small groups as follows:

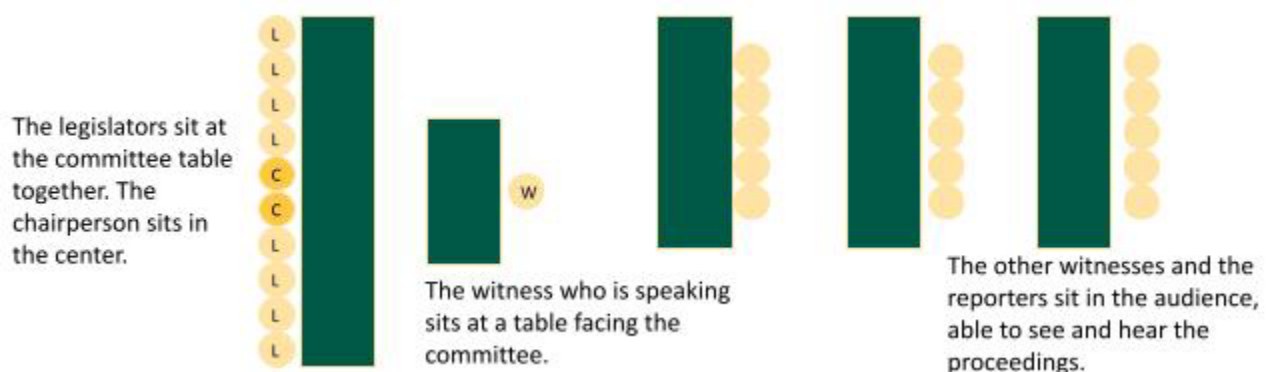
- 2 students as committee chair in one group
- 16 students as oversight legislators, divided into groups of 2
- 12 students as witnesses, divided into groups of 2

Class size will affect group distribution and sizes. As long as you have at least 1 chair, 8 legislators, and exactly 6 witnesses, you will be able to run the simulation. Every student who does not play a role in the actual hearing as a chair, legislator, or witness will play the role of reporter.

3. The student teams will now have time to research and prepare for the oversight hearing. **(30-45 min)**
 - **Legislator/Chair Teams:** This time will be spent brainstorming on the issues to be addressed, writing speaking points for a brief opening statement, and organizing questions for each of the six witnesses. They should use the **witness summary document** as well as any additional research they would like to conduct. Students should review the **committee rules** so that they are prepared for the hearing. They should be reminded that they will only have ten minutes to speak with each witness. Students should use the **legislator preparation worksheet** during this time.
 - **Witness Teams:** This time will be spent reading the **witness background** for their role. They should be preparing an opening statement as well as brainstorming answers to possible questions they might be asked. Students should use the **witness preparation worksheet** during this time.
4. After students have been given research and preparation time, each group will need to decide which member of the group will play the roles of legislator/witness; everyone who is not active in the hearing will be a reporter.

Period 3

1. As students enter the classroom, the following setup will be required:



2. Review the committee rules as a whole class and then ask the chair to call the session to order. The chair will give a brief (1-2 minute) opening statement. The co-chair may also give a brief opening statement at this time. The chair will then call the first witness. Each witness, when called, should give a brief (1-2 minute) opening statement about who they are and their role in this issue. Then, legislators take no more than 10 minutes to question the witness. While the hearing is occurring, legislators should be completing the **committee hearing note catcher**, reporters should be completing the **reporter worksheet**, and witnesses who are not testifying should be completing the **witness worksheet**. (60 min)

Period 4

1. The legislators meet to debrief the hearing. Their responsibility is to write a summary of the facts that were uncovered by the hearing, the key problems identified, and one to two legislative recommendations for how the legislature can prevent the harm or problems that occurred in this situation. Legislators should be completing the **deliberation worksheet**.
2. During this time, reporters meet to summarize their understanding of the hearing and develop 3-4 questions to ask the legislators during their press conference. Reporters should be completing the **reporter worksheet**.
3. During this time, witnesses should finish completing the **witness worksheet**. (20 min)
4. Legislators will present their findings and recommendations. (5 min)
5. Then, they will take questions from reporters. (10 min)
6. Assign students the assessment activity and allow time for brainstorming and questions. (20 min)

Assessment

Using a digital creation tool (Google Slides, PowerPoint, Canva, etc.) students will create a Public Service Announcement to inform the public about the outcomes of the oversight hearing. The PSA should include the following:

- A summary of the problem that was brought to the committee
- One or two possible solutions to avoid the problem in the future
- Attention-grabbing and creative graphics that would catch the public's attention
- The final product should be something that could be shared on social media (images, a short video, infographic)

Additional Resources

[Defining Congressional Oversight and Measuring its Effectiveness](#) by Senator Carl Levin and Elise J. Bean

[What the US Constitution Says and Doesn't Say About Truth](#) Detroit Today (9/29/21)

[What is Oversight?](#) Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy

[McGrain v. Daugherty, 273 U.S. 135 \(1927\)](#)

Committee Rules and Procedures

1. Begin the hearing by having the chair call the committee to order and make a brief opening statement introducing the subject and purpose of the session.
 - a. The chair may describe important events leading to the hearing and key contemporary issues.
 - b. They also may outline the committee's approach to the issue and the order of the witnesses.
 - c. If there is a co-chair, the chair recognizes the co-chair to make an opening statement.
2. Following the committee member's opening statements, the chair calls the first witness.
3. Each witness, when called, gives an opening statement where they provide information on who they are, their role in the scenario that led to the hearing, and how they expect to contribute to the hearing.
4. Following witness opening statements, committee members may question the witnesses. The committee will use alphabetical order of last name to determine the order in which legislators may question witnesses. The committee has **ten minutes total** to question each witness.
5. The committee chair (or co-chair) tracks the time each legislator has used and notifies them when they have one minute left and are out of time for each witness. If a legislator is done asking questions, they end their turn by saying, "I yield the remainder of my time to the chair." Any legislator may also yield their time to any other legislator on the committee.
6. Once each member of the committee has had an opportunity to ask the witnesses questions, the chair can begin the rotation again (in alphabetical order) or can call on specific legislators who have questions. This is up to the chair's discretion.
7. Once the witness has finished testifying, the chair thanks the witness and allows them to step down. The chair then calls the next witness to repeat the process.
8. The committee chair closes the hearing at the end of the question-and-answer period once all witnesses have been questioned. The chair thanks the witnesses for participating and announces the press conference to be held for the public.

Name: _____

Legislator Preparation Worksheet

What are your committee’s overall questions for this investigation?

Witness Name/Organization	Relevant Expertise and Knowledge	Possible Questions



Name: _____

Witness Preparation Worksheet

Role: _____

Brief opening statement:

What facts are the most important to include during your questioning?	
What are one or two suggestions that you want to share with the legislators?	
What topic or issue do you want to avoid during your questioning?	

Name: _____

Oversight Committee Hearing Note Catcher

Witness #1		
Questions	Responses	Additional Notes/Comments

Witness #2		
Questions	Responses	Additional Notes/Comments

Witness #3		
Questions	Responses	Additional Notes/Comments

Witness #4		
Questions	Responses	Additional Notes/Comments

Witness #5:		
Questions	Responses	Additional Notes/Comments

Witness #6:		
Questions	Responses	Additional Notes/Comments

Name: _____

Reporter Worksheet

Record the timeline of events and facts of the case.

Record quotes from witnesses.

Quote or Idea	Who Said It?

Record solutions or suggestions that were offered during the hearing.

What follow-up questions do you have for the legislators? What is still unclear about the situation?

Name: _____

Witness Worksheet

As you listen to the other testimony and interviews, record at least one question you would ask the other witnesses if you had the opportunity.

Witness Name/Title	Follow Up Question

Following your chance to testify, reflect on your time. What is one thing that you would like to tell the committee that you feel like you didn't get a chance to?

Name: _____

Oversight Hearing Deliberation Worksheet

As a team of legislators, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the oversight hearing. On the chart below, summarize the facts of the case, how and when you learned them, and the solutions you think would prevent this from happening again in the future.

Facts of the Case	Provided by Witness
Legislative Recommendations	
1.	
2.	
3.	