

Tips for ensuring a successful Choices role-play experience with your students

- 1) The Choices role-plays are either historically situated or focused on current controversies that are complex in nature. To effectively engage in a role-play, it is essential that students understand the historical context and issues shaping the debate. To expedite this process, it is important that you **begin your planning by reading over the options and identify the core concepts and issues that your students will need to know for the role-play activity**. By doing so, you can target your instruction around these key points and provide a clear focus for your students. It is also important to identify and introduce the key vocabulary and terminology and encourage students to incorporate this lexicon into their presentations.
- 2) Before students begin their prep for the role-play, be sure to **make all your expectations clear to your students**. They will perform at a much higher level if they know in advance how they will be held accountable. It is recommended that students be evaluated not only on their performance and their understanding of the issues, but also on their ability to work with their peers and behave respectfully.
- 3) **Provide concrete tasks for students to complete during their preparation and try to make sure that there is a balance in workload between the option presenters and the committee/citizens groups**. While some explicit tasks are outlined within the curriculum materials, it is helpful to supplement this with additional questions or tasks. For example, you may want to require the option groups to incorporate a certain number of quotes or vocabulary words into their presentations, or you may pose additional questions of the citizens in order to help them gain a more nuanced understanding of their character. The more concrete the task, the more focused students will be during their prep time.
- 4) Take time to **set the stage and establish the mood for the role-play scenario**. The more students are able to get into that moment, the better they will perform and the more they will gain from the experience. Take a moment to review the main points of controversy and try to explain why this particular moment is such a critical turning point (i.e. what is at stake?). Also try to establish the mood and physical setting for the role-play scenario: Are tensions high? Are people scared? Is it a town hall meeting, a senate committee hearing, etc.
- 5) **Clearly explain the mechanisms of the role-play**. Go over the step-by-step sequencing of the activity and let students know in advance how the activity will unfold. It is also recommended that the **behavior etiquette be explicitly outlined** (i.e. who is allowed to speak when, and what types of things can and cannot be said.) Because you are asking students to step into someone else's shoes and essentially act, and because they are addressing controversial issues while assuming these roles, what constitutes appropriate behavior can be confusing for many students.
- 6) **During the role-play, you want to give as much control over to the students as they can handle**. The more students become more familiar with the structure and expectations, the less the teacher needs to intervene during the role-play activity. However, with younger or less experienced students, teachers may need to occasionally step into the activity. Sometimes the discussion gets sidetracked, or etiquette boundaries are broken. In these situations, it is important for the teacher to intervene to get the role-play back on track. Further, if students are missing some of the more salient points, it is sometimes helpful if the teacher steps into the role of committee member or citizen to pose challenging and relevant questions.
- 7) To get the most out of the role-play, **it is important to take some time afterwards to debrief with your students**. The first couple of times you use the role-plays with students, it is helpful to debrief both the process and the content of the role-play. As students become more familiar with the structure and expectations, you may choose to focus more on the content. For current issue units, it is important that students have the opportunity to step outside of their assigned role and evaluate the options from a more personal viewpoint. Challenge students to identify both the strengths and the shortcomings of each option from their own perspectives. Ultimately, students should be encouraged to frame their own option reflecting their views. For historical units, debriefing should focus more on examining cause and effect, and understanding the implications of this moment as a historical turning point.