

# Workshop 1

## Freedom of Religion

### Key Concepts

- A constructivist teacher is one who builds on students' previous knowledge and experiences and helps them build new knowledge through hands-on learning.
- The teacher's role in this lesson is one of a guide rather than a presenter. She uses a variety of questioning techniques to help students consider multiple points of view, make use of the background information they have, differentiate between facts and opinions, and stay focused on the constitutional issues under consideration. Good use of questioning also demonstrates the principle of "wait time"—giving students a chance to grapple with a question and form a response before jumping in with another question or providing an answer for the students.
- The mock trial seen in the lesson is a culminating activity that builds on previous lessons that used a variety of teaching methodologies, including direct teaching and textbook reading.
- Successful cooperative learning depends in part on relationships—among students and between the teacher and students. Building these relationships needs to begin early in the school year and improve over time.
- To keep students on task, it is important to let them know exactly how they will be assessed.

# About the Lesson

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## Overview

The lesson shown in this video demonstrates the constructivist methodologies of questioning strategies and their use in mock trials. It features ninth-grade civics students at Southwest High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in a simulation of a U.S. Supreme Court hearing concerning a First Amendment case. The case concerns a Texas school district that appealed a lower court decision directing them to discontinue having a student deliver an invocation over the intercom before football games. The case was originally brought against the school district by a group of parents. The Southwest students—who do not know the actual outcome of the case at the start of the lesson—assume the roles of Supreme Court Justices and attorneys. Over a three-day period, students first work in groups to prepare for the hearing as their teacher, Kristen Borges, guides them with strategically asked questions, then participate in the hearing, and finally, debrief their experiences and write a short essay stating their position on the case, including the benefits and potential problems to society of their recommended decision. The methodologies highlighted in this lesson include questioning strategies and mock trials.

## Context

**Teacher:** Kristen Borges has been a social studies teacher at Southwest High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota, since 1996. She team-teaches Arts and Humanities Civics with an English teacher and has created an arts-infused interdisciplinary curriculum. She also teaches the senior level International Baccalaureate History of the Americas course, which focuses on the history of Latin America. She has also coached the speech team. Prior to coming to Southwest, Borges taught for a year and a half at other Minnesota high schools. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science from Providence College in Rhode Island, and a Master of Arts in teaching social studies from Bridgewater State College in Massachusetts.

**School:** Southwest High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is a site-based managed school with a multicultural enrollment of approximately 1,700 students in grades nine through 12. The school is committed to promoting academic excellence, creativity, critical thinking, lifetime-learning skills, and physical well-being for all students in a safe learning environment. The school values cultural diversity and global interdependence, and nurtures a respect for the environment. Southwest attaches importance to its collaborative relationship among staff, students, parents, administrators, and community members.

**Course:** The title of the course, which runs over two semesters, is Team 9 Arts and Humanities Civics. It is part of an English, arts, and humanities block in which teachers are permitted to be flexible in how they allocate the two-hour block.

The beginning of the year focuses on the foundations of U.S. Government and the structures of government at both the national and local level. Economics and its role in U.S. government is the focus in the middle of the year. In the final part of the year, the class examines the legal system, civil justice, and particularly the way that the government deals with current issues.

Students have spent a significant amount of time looking at the foundation documents of the United States, including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and specifically the Bill of Rights. Early in the year, Borges concentrated on the vocabulary of the documents, exploring in-depth the language used by the founders. More recently, she has had students interpret the documents in their own language. Students have been exploring how a document that was written more than 200 years ago can be applied to current issues in our society, particularly controversial ones.

The students have looked at how the Federal judicial branch is structured and at the court system. Local lawyers have explained how they argue cases. The class studied the structure of the Supreme Court, how Supreme Court Justices are appointed by the President and approved by the Senate, including the influence of politics in the appointment process, how a Supreme Court hearing is organized, and how the Justices deliberate and reach decisions. The text, *We the People* (Center for Civic Education, 1998), was used to teach the types of constitutional interpretation commonly used by the court.

Before this lesson begins, students will have learned and practiced the skills used by both the Justices and attorneys appearing before the Supreme Court and will have applied them to several cases, including *Tinker v. Des Moines*.

# Workshop Session

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## Before Viewing

Discuss these questions with other workshop participants or record your responses in your workshop journal:

- Describe a lesson in which you have used cooperative learning. What were the challenges and rewards of using this methodology instead of direct teaching?
- If you have never used cooperative learning, imagine that you will be teaching a lesson tomorrow on the First Amendment, specifically on the principle of the separation of church and state. Think about how you might have students work together in small groups to learn this information. How would you divide the class and what specific assignments would you give each group?

## Watch the Video

Watch the video, stopping at the end of each segment. Use the following questions as a basis for discussion and reflection. If you are not attending the workshop with other teachers, use your workshop journal to respond to at least two questions per lesson activity.

### Activity 1. Attorneys and Justices Prepare for Trial

- How would you state the objectives of this activity?
- How do you usually teach this content? Was there anything about the way this lesson was taught that you might try in the future?
- In what ways does this activity exemplify constructivist learning principles?
- How does Borges guide the group's discussions? If necessary, replay portions of the program to note specific situations and how she handled them. Try to categorize her questions in the manner suggested in the article *Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Socratic Questioning*.

### Activity 2. Attorneys Argue Before the Supreme Court

- How effectively do you think the students used the background material that was available to them?
- Borges talks about the need to give up some control and adopt flexibility in using this teaching methodology. Where do you see evidence of these attributes in this lesson? Were there any points in the activity when you would have liked to step in and exercise more control than you saw? What about those moments, if any, made you uncomfortable?
- If you were dividing your class into working groups, would you allow students to choose their own groups or assign them, and why?
- Did you notice any techniques for facilitating group discussions that might enhance your own teaching? Identify them and discuss how you might use them in your class.

**Facilitator's Note:** In your initial communication with workshop participants, suggest they review the Lesson Plan on the workshop Web site prior to attending the session, focusing particularly on the Lesson Materials and Assessment sections.

Have available copies of *Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Socratic Questioning* from the Essential Readings section of the Web site for participants to consult during the discussion of Activity 1.

During Activity 3, participants will also need a copy of Instructions for Supreme Court Justices from the Student Instructions Packet available with the Lesson Materials in the Lesson Plan section of the Web site:

[www.learner.org/channel/workshops/civics](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/civics)

Select from among the Before Next Week suggestions those you would like participants to complete and turn in.

# Workshop Session, cont'd.

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## **Activity 3. Supreme Court Deliberation and Decision**

- What would you expect the rest of the class to be doing while this group is deliberating?
- Review the Instructions for Supreme Court Justices (from the Student Instructions Packet in Lesson Materials on the Web site) that these students were given to help prepare them for their roles. How well do you think the guidelines were followed? What changes, if any, would you make to this document for your class?

## **Activity 4. Large-Group Discussion**

- What techniques does Borges use to help students critique what has transpired?
- How successful do you think this lesson was? What elements made it successful and which were problematic?
- What parts of this lesson resonated for you and why?
- What challenges do you think you would encounter if you chose to use this lesson in your classroom? How would you overcome them?
- What does this lesson have to do with advancing civic participation among students?

# Before Next Week

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## Assignments

- Practice facilitating a class discussion in which your responses to students are always in the form of questions. If school is not in session, try this technique with some colleagues as a mock lesson. Reflect on your experience and your reactions to it in your workshop journal.
- Select one of the following Supreme Court cases located in the Lesson Materials on the workshop Web site: *Lemon v. Kurtzman* or *Tinker v. DesMoines*. Prepare a summary of it that you think would be appropriate to prepare your students to participate in a mock trial.
- Review the Instructions for Supreme Court Opinion Essay located in Lesson Materials, this lesson's final assignment, and the Scoring Sheet for Final Essay located in Assessment on the workshop Web site. Decide whether you feel this assignment and rubric would work for your class. Make such alterations as you feel would make it a better fit.
- Review those sections of the Web site that you have not yet read, e.g., Essential Readings, Other Lessons, Teacher Perspectives, and Student Perspectives.
- You may want to read *The Student Voices Project* located in Essential Readings for Workshop 2 before next week's session.

**[www.learner.org/channel/workshops/civics](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/civics)**

# Notes

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