

# Mock Congressional Hearing

After learning about both sides of a controversial topic, this experiential learning activity gives an opportunity for students to demonstrate their understanding of an issue in public policy. This summative activity is an interactive way to have students engage in various roles related to public policy change, and empowers them to affect policy both now and in the future.

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## Objectives:

- To simulate a democratic process / meeting with a decision-maker.
- To assess student understanding of a public policy issue.

## Materials:

- [Shark Policy Research Organizer](#)
- [Mock Hearing Character Roles](#)

## Process:

- 1) Explain to students that maintaining or improving existing shark fisheries management is a public policy issue that is often being discussed and debated. The goal of shark fisheries management is to have management measures in place that would prevent overfishing, and give overfished shark species a better chance to rebuild their stocks to a sustainable population level.
- 2) To begin, students use the shark policy research organizer to gather information by researching existing laws on shark fisheries management or specifically the [U.S. Shark Conservation Act](#), the [U.S. Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act \(MSA\)](#), and [CITES](#). If students are not using computers, please print each of these resources.
- 3) This background information will help to prepare students for the mock hearing. The teacher describes the hearing activity as follows:

*A piece of proposed legislation is being brought forward to a mock committee of decision makers. The legislation encourages a science-based approach to fisheries conservation and management to significantly reduce the overfishing and unsustainable trade of sharks, rays, and skates around the world; in addition to preventing shark finning. This legislation would promote sustainable management of shark fisheries globally by ensuring that all shark, ray, and skate products entering our local markets come from fisheries that follow high standard practices. Some students will play the role of people who support the legislation and want it passed into law. Other students will play the roles of people who do not support the legislation and do not want it passed into law. Remaining students will play roles of observers and need to report what has been said during the hearing. Committee members will eventually vote whether or not to move the legislation forward.*

- 4) The teacher assigns roles in one of three general groups to all students in the class: committee members, witnesses, or observers. Teachers should ensure some students speak in favor of and some against the issue. Students receive the mock hearing character roles to learn more about their task during the hearing. Once students know their assigned roles, they prepare their remarks. The teacher may provide sources to the witnesses in order for them to learn more about their specific job or they may expect them to research it themselves.
- 5) The committee chairperson begins the hearing by making an opening statement that is a short summary of the legislation being introduced.
- 6) Next, the witnesses are each allowed 3-5 minutes to make their statements.
- 7) Once all the witnesses have made their statements, the committee members each get an opportunity to ask clarifying and probing questions of the witnesses. You may want to assign a question limit or time limit for each student acting as a committee member.
- 8) At the conclusion of the hearing, all committee members must vote to either move the legislation forward or to oppose it.
- 9) Each student will have had to write something either coming into the hearing, during, or after the meeting. Those statements, testimonies, reports, or news articles, can be submitted and graded as assessments for this activity.

### **Extension:**

- Have students who were observers in the audience participate in a television/news broadcast talking about the hearing. Those who were journalists must report on what was discussed during the meeting. Those who were political operatives can appear as “guests” on the show and share their opinions on what was discussed and on the issue itself.

### **Supplemental Resources:**

- a. For an example of previously proposed legislation you can research [H.R. 5248](#) “Sustainable Shark Fisheries and Trade Act”.

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