

Role-play is an effective learning strategy in which students act the part of another character, thereby gaining an appreciation for others' points of view as well as an understanding of the complexity of resolving issues and problems in the real world. In the context of social studies, this strategy may be used to learn about issues and decisions of the past (and how things might have been different) or about current issues in the local community or in a broader setting. Aside from knowledge acquisition, preparing and conducting a role-play activity strengthens students' knowledge acquisition skills, their creativity, their value clarification skills, and a variety of interpersonal skills identified in the curriculum outcomes.

Preparation for Role-Play:

- Identify an appropriate issue or controversy, past or present, that requires resolution.
- Select an issue that involves a number of parties, each of which brings its own perspectives to the debate or discussion.
- Students should have a good general knowledge of the issue before roles are selected.
- Clearly identify the parties and individuals involved, and select roles accordingly.
- All students should have a specific role. In addition to participants in the actual debate, there might be members of a commission, court personnel, civic leaders, media, et cetera.
- Students conduct research to collect information about the specific views of the party or individual they represent in the role-play.
- Students use information they have collected to clarify their viewpoints and to develop their arguments and strategies for maximum effect in the role-play activity.
- Students also seek to understand other viewpoints and to develop counter-arguments.
- The nature of the role-play activity (council meeting, public hearing, court case, etc.) is determined and reviewed before proceeding.

Conducting the Role-Play:

- Ensure that the physical setting (room, furniture placement, necessary equipment) is appropriate for the nature of the role-play.
- Props and costumes may be included to provide a more authentic experience.
- The issue and its real-life setting are reviewed before proceeding.
- Unless playing a specific character, the teacher's role should be limited to occasional procedural advice as appropriate. At no time should the teacher attempt to influence or favour a particular viewpoint.
- The role-play activity should have an appropriate real-life conclusion, such as a statement or decision announcement by the head of a commission, judge, or mayor.
- In the case of a hearing or court case, the role-play should include an opportunity for the commissioners or jury to meet, discuss evidence provided, and reach a decision.

Debriefing

In order to maximize the role-play learning experience, it is critical for students to have an opportunity to step out of their roles and debrief, including a discussion on how they felt playing the role, and a review of the issues and the evidence and arguments presented. Individual students' positions may or may not have changed; however, they will have a much better understanding of the issues as well as the complexity and importance of resolving real-world problems. Solving problems involves debate, negotiations, and consensus building.