



Pro Se Court

By Kathryn Notarpole, Mesa Public Schools
Secondary School/ Two Periods

Introduction:

Pro Se means to speak on one's behalf. A Pro Se court asks students to take a side on an issue and present evidence to support that side. A student judge will decide on who presents the best argument. This lesson demonstrates how pro se court can be used in a variety of content areas. It is particularly effective in a social studies class when getting students ready for a Document Based Question (DBQ). For example, were the states that seceded justified in doing so between 1860-61? What caused the Salem Witch Trial Hysteria of 1692? An English class may use pro se court to have students reflect on an interesting question presented in a text: Was the defendant guilty in *Twelve Angry Men*? Based on evidence from *The Giver*, what is more important, society or the individual? Etc.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify and explain evidence in a small debate setting to support their claim.

Guiding Questions:

- How do I use evidence to support my claim?
- How do I use evidence to counter the claim of the opposition?

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

Materials:

- Presenter Guide
- Judge Guide
- Materials related to your chosen topic

Classroom Activities

- **Lesson Activity One: Research**
 - o Students are assigned a role and they research their topic using primary sources.

- **Lesson Activity Two: Pro Se Court**
 - o Presenters share their primary arguments and then counter their opponents' arguments.
- **Lesson Activity Three: Pro Se Court Wrap-Up**
 - o The student judge makes a final ruling on the best-presented argument.

Lesson Activity One: Research

Divide the class into groups of three. Either randomly assign roles (Side A, Side B, and Judge) or have students decide once they are in their groups. Once students have roles, give them their appropriate guide.

Give the students a class period to review the topic-related materials that you have provided. Side A and B compile evidence that supports their claim as well as evidence that disproves the opposition (counterargument). The judge will look through the evidence and come up with a series of unbiased questions to ask each side. These should be thoughtful questions that ask for more than a yes or no response.

Lesson Activity Two: Pro Se Court

Side A	Judge
Side B	

Students move their desks to create mini courts in the room. Side A and B face each other and the judge sits off to the side facing both of them. Many courts occur at the same time. Side A has five minutes to present their claim, and then Side B has five minutes to present their claim. While Side A presents, Side B takes notes on how they want to respond during their counterargument and visa versa. While both sides are presenting, the judge keeps track of the evidence presented on their point sheet (back of Pro-Se Court Judge Worksheet).

After both sides have presented, each has three minutes to present their counterargument. After that, the judge has five minutes to ask them their questions. The judge will then have two minutes to explain which side won and why.

Lesson Activity Three: Pro Se Court Wrap-Up

Each judge needs to present to the class who they choose as the winner and why. You should keep a running tally to see which side wins overall in the class. As a class, you can discuss some of the best arguments used.

Assessment:

If there is time in class, have students write their final paragraph explaining which side they personally agree with. They should cite at least three examples. If there is not time in class, this can be done as homework.



Name: _____

Period: _____

Pro Se Court – Presenters

A Pro Se Court asks you to focus on the evidence (logos) and defend an argument. You, as the presenter, also need to appear believable (ethos), so your presence and posture need to show that you are credible.

Before the Court:

Topic:	
Your Claim:	
Three Pieces of Evidence that Support YOUR Claim:	Evidence that supports the OPPOSING Claim:
	Why is this evidence wrong? (Counterargument)

Pro Se Court Timeline:

Side A: Five Minutes
(Present claim)

Side B: Five Minutes
(Present Claim)

Side A: Three Minutes
(Present
Counterargument)

Side B: Three Minutes
(Present
Counterargument)

Judge: Five Minutes
(Question and Answer
Period)

Judge: Two Minutes
(Final Ruling)

During the Court:

While the other side is presenting, note any points they make that you want to address in your counterargument below.

After the Court:

Now that you've heard both sides, which claim do you personally agree with? Write a well-developed paragraph that uses at least three pieces of evidence to prove your point.



Name: _____

Period: _____

Pro Se Court – Judge

As a Judge in a Pro Se Court, it is your job to focus on the evidence presented. Your personal opinion must be set aside.

What questions do you want Side A to address? These should not be “Yes” or “No” questions.	What questions do you want Side B to address? These should not be “Yes” or “No” questions.

Before the Court:

During the Court:

Side A		Side B	
Logos		Logos	
Presented a Clear Claim (up to Three Points)		Presented a Clear Claim (up to Three Points)	
Presented Evidence to support their Claim (Each new piece of evidence is worth Two Points)		Presented Evidence to support their Claim (Each new piece of evidence is worth Two Points)	
Presented Evidence to support their counterargument (Each new piece of evidence is worth Two Points)		Presented Evidence to support their counterargument (Each new piece of evidence is worth Two Points)	
Answered Questions with Evidence and Explanation (up to Five Points)		Answered Questions with Evidence and Explanation (up to Five Points)	
Ethos		Ethos	

Presence and Posture showed their authority on the topic (up to five points)		Presence and Posture showed their authority on the topic (up to five points)	
Total:		Total:	

After the Court:

Now that you've heard both sides, which claim do you personally agree with? Write a well-developed paragraph that uses at least three pieces of evidence to prove your point.
