Congressional Hearing Follow-Up Questions

Lesson Overview

Compelling Question

- Does the use of effective questioning lead to deeper understanding than prepared testimony alone?

Suggested Grade(s)	Grades 5–12 Level 2 & Level 3	**Time Required**	One to two class periods

Lesson Objectives

- Examine the expectations and purpose of the follow-up question portion of the simulated congressional hearing.
- Identify types of questions including knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
- Create effective follow-up questions.
- Demonstrate public speaking skills to verbally respond to follow-up questions.

Lesson Assessments

- Students demonstrate their understanding of simulated congressional hearing follow-up questions by crafting, delivering, and answering questions with partner teams.

- Teachers may assess by using the Assessment Rubric.
- Students will participate in self-reflection by completing the Inquiry Reflection Tool.

Lesson Overview

Civic Skills & Dispositions

- Active learning
- Active listening
- Consensus building
- Considering multiple perspectives
- Critical thinking
- Decision-making
- Effective communication
- Goal setting
- Incorporating feedback
- Open-mindedness
- Providing and receiving feedback
- Reflection
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Teamwork

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Focus

Students will develop their social awareness by

- understanding and empathizing with others, including people from diverse backgrounds; recognizing social norms and emotions; and
- fostering respectful, collaborative relationships.

Alignments

Center for Civic Education
We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution
(Level 2, third edition, and
Level 3, fourth and fifth editions)

- Simulated congressional hearing experiential learning preparation

Educating for American Democracy Roadmap
Theme #7: A People with Contemporary Debates & Possibilities

- Grades 6–12: Cultivate an understanding of personal interests, motivations, and decisions as civic agents

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework

- **D2.His.6.6-8.** Analyze how people's perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.
- **D2.His.11.9-12.** Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.

Common Core Standards for Literacy in Social Studies

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2: Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

Pre-Lesson Preparation

Supporting Question(s)

- Why should my team be prepared for follow-up questions?
- How can we create compelling and effective questions?
- How will we effectively answer compelling questions using evidence to support our opinions?

Texts & Materials

- I Dissent Topic Cards slide deck
- Congressional Committees video
- WTP Hearing Questions
- Simulated Congressional Hearing Scoring Rubric
- Scoring Guidelines:
- Florida Unit 4-Miami Lakes Middle School
- We the People: Middle School Simulated Congressional Hearing
- What strategy was used by the Federalists to gain support for the Constitution?
- Only One Civics Team Can Win The National Finals | Citizen Nation | Full Episode 4 of 4 | PBS (35:33–36:10)
- Follow-Up Observations organizer
- Follow-Up Question Brainstorm organizer
- Giving Team Feedback collection tool
- Exit Ticket
- Inquiry Reflection Tool
- Assessment Rubric

Vocabulary

- **congressional hearing:** meeting or session of a Senate, House, joint, or special committee of Congress to obtain information and opinions on proposed legislation, conduct an investigation, or evaluate/oversee the activities of a government department or the implementation of a federal law

Pre-Lesson Preparation

Teacher Background

The hearing preparation process is an ideal opportunity to be culturally responsive and empower all students when educators do the following:

- **Create diverse, inclusive teams:** When forming teams, consider students' backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles. Aim for a mix that encourages collaboration and helps students learn from different perspectives.
- **Set clear expectations:** Be explicit about the goals and expectations for teamwork, speech writing, delivery, and feedback. Share rubrics or guidelines so students know what success looks like.
- **Foster an inclusive classroom:** Build a classroom culture where every student feels safe sharing their ideas. Establish norms for respectful communication, active listening, and valuing diverse viewpoints.
- **Support effective collaboration:** Give students clear strategies for working together—active listening, brainstorming, dividing tasks, and reaching consensus. Make sure every student has a chance to contribute meaningfully.
- **Scaffold speech writing and delivery:** Chunk the process into manageable steps. Provide models, graphic organizers, or templates to guide students as they organize ideas, use evidence, and connect their arguments to constitutional and historical examples.
- **Encourage feedback and reflection:** Include time for peer feedback and self-reflection. Teach students how to give feedback that's specific, respectful, and useful, and help them set goals for continued growth.

The purpose of this lesson is to help students understand and prepare for the follow-up questioning portion of the simulated congressional hearing. Students will develop the questioning, listening, interpretation, critical thinking, and public speaking skills necessary to actively and effectively participate in the hearing.

Preparation:

- Before this lesson, the teacher should have already grouped students in teams of four to six (depending on class size) and assigned them a prompt for the simulated congressional hearing.
- Organize desks to accommodate all members of the teams. This will help students communicate verbally and nonverbally with each other.
- Recommended to complete 8 Decoding SCH Questions Lesson prior to this lesson.
- Before this lesson, students should have written at least in part their testimony based on their assigned questions.

Additional resources for teacher background include the following:

- Simulated Congressional Hearings: Preparation & Practice (CEAS Pedagogy Video 1)
- Literacy Integration: Vocabulary & Paraphrasing (CEAS Pedagogy Video 2)
- Building Relational Capacity through Peer Feedback (CEAS Pedagogy Video 3)
- Creating Community Agreements (CEAS Pedagogy Video 4)

Educators should preview all lesson materials prior to delivering the lesson.

Lesson Plan: Day 1

Engage: Activate Prior Knowledge

1. Greet students upon entry into the classroom, and welcome them to social studies.
2. Tell students they will practice taking and defending a position on the spot. This is a skill they will need during the follow-up portion of their simulated congressional hearing.
3. Designate one side of the classroom as "agree" and the other side as "disagree."
4. Display the I Dissent Topic Cards slide deck. As you read each statement, conduct a class vote in which students will agree or disagree in a "vote with your feet" exercise.
    - Make a point to emphasize this act of voting. Explain that everyone's opinions matter and we want everyone to have a voice in our classroom decisions. Furthermore, voting is a civic responsibility we are modeling now.
5. After students choose a side, call on two per side to quickly and succinctly defend their position. Attempt to select different students each time so nearly everyone is randomly called upon.
6. Return to a full-class format and facilitate a discussion by asking
    - Did you feel scared or nervous when you were called on randomly?
    - Did you feel uncomfortable or worried when you had to defend your position on the fly?
7. Encourage students to share their feelings aloud and let them know that these feelings are valid. The activity helps us to practice for this follow-up question portion of the simulated congressional hearing.

Instructional Supports

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Establish norms for respectful communication, active listening, and valuing diverse viewpoints.
- Be mindful of potential cultural differences and other factors that might influence expectations or opinions around slide deck topics.
- Desks arranged in tables/clusters are recommended to facilitate better student collaboration.
- Slide deck could be modified to include additional topics that may be of particular interest to your students.
- Allow sufficient wait time for students to formulate answers.

Multilingual Learners (ML)

- Use translation tools to modify the topic cards as needed.
- Slide deck could be enhanced with visuals to support concept attainment.
- Slide deck could be modified to include additional topics that may be culturally relevant to your students.
- Be mindful of potential cultural differences, neurodiversity, and other factors that might influence expectations around speech and eye contact.
- Working in trio teams to discuss topics before deciding may support multilingual learners.

Civic Competencies

- Active learning
- Decision-making
- Effective communication
- Relationship skills
- Self-management
- Social awareness

Extending Learning

- Students could create other topics or scenarios encouraging other teams to respond and defend positions.

Lesson Plan: Day 1

Explore: Guided/Open Inquiry

1. Tell students, Today we are going to explore why congressional hearings include follow-up questions for the witnesses.
2. Display the compelling question: Does the use of effective questioning lead to deeper understanding than the testimony alone?
3. Allow students to make predictions about the inquiry question, brainstorm possible answers, and formulate their own supporting questions.
4. Play the Center's 60-second video Congressional Committees.
5. As students watch, they should listen for why Congress holds public hearings.
6. Play the video a second time to ensure comprehension, if needed.
7. Allow time for a brief discussion about the purpose of congressional hearings or an opportunity for students' questions. Explain that congressional committees and hearings allow members of Congress to study issues in detail, gather expert testimony, and review proposed laws. They help ensure legislation is informed, transparent, and carefully considered before it is brought to a vote.
8. Provide students with several examples of real-word congressional hearing follow-up exchanges to explore. Consider finding modern examples and/or testimonies that cover topics your students are interested in. As students explore, they should record their observations about the hearings.
    - Sen. Paul (R-KY) Asks, If Reversed, Would Removing a President Be Act of War
    - Word for Word: Senators Question Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg
    - Sen. Josh Hawley to Visa & Mastercard: "This is classic monopolistic behavior."
    - Rep. AOC Calls Out CVS Health's Corporate Strategy to Monopolize Patient Care

Instructional Supports

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- To support concept attainment of the purpose of congressional hearings, provide an analogy such as congressional committees and hearings are like group projects at school. A small team researches the topic, asks questions, and works out the details before presenting it to the whole class to decide on it.
- Working in trio teams to discuss videos before class discussion may support learners.

Multilingual Learners (ML)

- Explore subtitle options and change the language if viewing the video via YouTube.
- Provide students class discussion questions in advance to allow time to consider possible responses.

Civic Competencies

- Active listening
- Considering multiple perspectives
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

Extending Learning

- Students could seek out recordings of their local school board meetings or county/city council hearings to make additional observations of public hearing.

Lesson Plan: Day 1

9. Return to a full-class format and facilitate a discussion by asking the following:
    - What did you notice about the hearings?
    - Why do you think Congress asks follow-up questions to experts who provide testimony?
    - What do we learn from the follow-up questions?

Explain: Discuss and Share

1. Transition discussion into the simulated congressional hearing. Explain that as part of their SCH, students will participate in a follow-up question section with judges.
2. Distribute the Simulated Congressional Hearing Scoring Rubric and review to ensure students understand how their teams will be evaluated during their hearing.
3. Provide students with several examples of simulated congressional hearings, including the following:
    - Florida Unit 4-Miami Lakes Middle School
    - We the People: Middle School Simulated Congressional Hearing
    - What strategy was used by the Federalists to gain support for the Constitution?
    - Only One Civics Team Can Win The National Finals | Citizen Nation | Full Episode 4 of 4 | PBS (35:33–36:10)
4. Instruct students to complete the Follow-Up Observations organizer as students watch each video.
5. Return to a full-class format and facilitate a discussion. Possible questions include
    - How did the SCH compare to the congressional hearings?
    - What did you notice about student responses?
    - What techniques did you observe?

Instructional Supports

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Working in trio teams to discuss videos before class discussion may support learners.
- Allow sufficient wait time for students to formulate answers.
- Students could use a text-to-speech program to capture responses for the Follow-Up Feedback organizer.

Multilingual Learners (ML)

- Explore subtitle options and change the language if viewing the video via YouTube.
- Allow students to capture feedback thoughts in native language first, then translate using technology as needed.

Civic Competencies

- Critical thinking
- Reflection
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making
- Self-management

Extended Learning

- Students might brainstorm a list of important skills needed to successfully provide answers to follow-up questions during a hearing. Possible responses may include these:
    - Thinking on your feet
    - Good memory of facts
    - Passion for the topic
    - Knowledge about the question topics
    - Confidence in answers
    - Attention to detail

Lesson Plan: Day 1

Elaborate: Apply New Learning

Part 1:

1. Using your routine strategy, divide the class into their assigned simulated congressional hearing teams.
2. Instruct students to locate their assigned question and testimony they have prepared thus far.
3. Distribute the Follow-up Question Brainstorm organizer and review to ensure students understand expectations.
4. As a team, ask students to brainstorm follow-up questions they might be asked based on their topic and prepared testimony.
5. Circulate around the classroom to encourage teamwork, monitor student progress, provide clarification, or answer questions.

Part 2:

1. Pair two SCH teams together. SCH teams will work collaboratively with their classmates to role-play the simulated congressional hearing follow-up process.
2. Using their Follow-up Question Brainstorm organizer, teams will act as the judges, asking follow-up questions of their partner team.
    a. Example: Unit 1 will ask the Unit 6 questions to the Unit 6 students, and then Unit 6 will ask the Unit 1 questions to the Unit 1 students.
3. Distribute the Giving Team Feedback collection tool and review to ensure students understand expectations.
4. After each team presents, allot time for the partner team to capture their feedback on the Giving Team Feedback collection tool.
5. Review established norms for respectful communication, active listening, and valuing diverse viewpoints.
6. Ideally, all members of each respective team will complete a Giving Team Feedback collection tool to be exchanged with their partner team.
7. Circulate around the classroom to encourage teamwork, monitor student progress, provide clarification, or answer questions.

Instructional Supports

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Revisit established norms for respectful communication, active listening, and valuing diverse viewpoints.
- Share possible follow-up question examples to model how to complete the Follow-up Question Brainstorm organizer.
- Students could use a text-to-speech program to capture responses for the Follow-Up Feedback organizer.
- Model how to provide feedback for other teams.
- As partner teams are practicing follow-up, each session could be recorded for teams to use in goal-setting and future hearing preparations.
- Display a timer to provide visual cues and time allotted for each team's questioning.

Multilingual Learners (ML)

- Allow students to capture potential questions and feedback thoughts in native language first, then translate using technology as needed.

Civic Competencies

- Considering multiple perspectives
- Providing and receiving feedback
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Teamwork

Extending Learning

- Allow students time to begin to think through answers to the possible follow-up questions.

Lesson Plan: Day 1

Evaluate: Assess and Authentically Engage

1. Congratulate the students on reaching another milestone in their simulated congregational hearing journey!
2. Revisit the inquiry question: "Does the use of effective questioning lead to deeper understanding than prepared testimony alone?"
3. Encourage students to consider their initial thought to their question and reflect on their new learning in order to complete the SCH Follow-Up Question Exit Ticket.
4. Allow time for SCH teams to receive and discuss the feedback from their partner team.
5. Teams should revisit their Follow-up Question Brainstorm organizer to complete the final section on goal setting.
6. Consider utilizing the Inquiry Reflection Tool.

Instructional Supports

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Provide a few examples of goals to help teams get started.
- Invite students to create the goal manifesto digitally, via audio-visual, or in illustrated format to heighten ownership.

Multilingual Learners (ML)

- Allow students to capture goals in native language first, then translate using technology as needed.

Civic Competencies

- Consensus building
- Goal setting
- Incorporating feedback
- Open-mindedness
- Self-management

Extending Learning

- Teams might create a "goals manifesto" for their unit and then display these around the room. Encourage teams to refer to these goals as they prepare for the simulated congressional hearings.