

All Ohio County 4th and 8th grade students participated in the WALS Foundation Mock Trials since the beginning of the program in 2004. In 2010 it transferred to 5th grade students so the teachers could complete their West Virginia Next Generation Content Standard and Objective for Social Studies that states: “students should assume a role in a mock trial.”

The 5th grade students of Ohio County Schools have enjoyed multiple experiences in learning about our judicial system through the Mock Trial program designed and promoted by Barbara Knutsen, Executive Director of Wheeling Academy of Law and Science (WALS) Foundation.

Teachers and students were stimulated in developing keen powers of observation through viewing, enhanced listening strategies, improved speaking presentation skills, and the opportunity to write legal “briefs” pertaining to the Mock Trial learning sequence.

The format is highly engaging for all students. According to Amanda Shinsky, fifth grade teacher at Madison Elementary, “My students thoroughly enjoyed the Mock Trials. It is a great way for the students to interact with each other and have fun while still learning. They love how the trial is centered on characters they can relate to and understand. The Mock Trial program is an excellent way for the students to learn and understand the trial process in a short amount of time. It isn’t hard keeping their attention during this activity!”

Furthermore, the program is aligned with the learning outcomes expected and esteemed by educators. “The Mock Trial satisfied our important SS.5.C2 Next Generation Content Standard. Fifth Grade students at Wooddale School participated in Mock Trial proceedings with the help of local lawyers and a former Judge. These students role-played, in costume, each part of a trial and every student was involved in some way. As the children enjoyed their own parts, they also offered opinions through their research at school and used discussions with parents to help develop different characters' actions. In studying other trials such as Dred Scott, the questions they raised were very specific as they understood each person's stand and could effectively evaluate the roles of various trial participants. Students love full participation and refer to the trial in other lessons,” states Edie Fuller, fifth grade teacher.

As a leader in the education of our future citizens, the WALS Mock Trial Program is innovative and stimulating to young minds. We are deeply grateful to Barbara Knutsen for her dedication in service to the students of West Virginia. Her work provides a strong foundation for these learners as they develop the habits of mind in becoming productive West Virginia citizens.

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