

Deepwater Horizon Gulf Oil Spill Mock Public Meeting

The Shorebird Sister School Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service presents an activity that explores the roles of natural resource professionals and community members in a mock town meeting convened to address the recovery of the coastal habitats from the Gulf oil spill.

To learn more about the Shorebird Sister School Program (SSSP) visit <http://www.fws.gov/sssp>

Goal

Students will role play a mock public meeting convened to discuss the implications of the oil spill on an imagined Gulf Coast community and its natural environment. The role play format is a panel of local government experts answering questions from the public alarmed about the oil spill. Through research and role play, students gain an understanding of the duties and perspectives of both natural resource professionals and community members impacted by the spill, and begin to understand the complexities of decision making in the Gulf Region regarding wildlife and the environment. Students will become aware of the variety of natural resource professionals deployed to address the crisis.

Grade: 9-12

Time needed: 2 class periods.

Objectives: Students will —

1. Role play a person involved in the Gulf oil spill speaking at a town meeting, either as a member of the technical panel or as a questioning concerned citizen from the audience.
2. Research their assigned role to determine that person's perspective on the disaster.
3. If student role plays a technical panel member, research their role and write up a brief of their 3 general job duties and 3 oil spill duties
4. If student plays a community member questioning the panel, research their role and write up a 4 point rationale for their perspective and provide 2 questions for the technical panel.
5. Develop ground rules for the public meeting.

Correlation to National Standards (see attachment)

Vocabulary: public meeting, moderator

Skills: public speaking, research, reading comprehension, analyzing, questioning, role play

Subjects: language arts, social studies, science

Materials:

- Student worksheet
- Role-play character briefs
- Internet access
- Additional factsheets maybe needed for some panel roles and are listed under each.

Methods

Class Period 1

1. Before class, read the background article from National Wildlife Federation: The Big Oil Spill. Begin the class with an overview of the disaster spill asking questions to stimulate discussion. Here are some possible discussion questions.
 - Why are oil companies drilling in the Gulf of Mexico? What do we get from petroleum?
 - What happened to the oil rig?

- Why are people worried about the leak?
- What happens to the animals that became covered with oil?
- What happened when the oil reached the coast?

Fill in student knowledge gaps with information from the background article.

2. Ask students to think about all the people living and working in the area that may be affected by the spill. Generate a list on the board from the student's responses, making 2 columns, one column for the person and another column for how they are affected and their concerns.

Person	How Affected
Mother	Worries about the safety of feeding local seafood to her family, or her children swimming and playing on the coast.
Commercial Fisherman	Earns his living from Gulf fisheries, concerned about his livelihood and the future of his industry.

3. Explain that today the class will be participating in a mock public meeting. The meeting is being called to address Gulf community concerns and answer questions about the restoration of the coastal habitats, wildlife and fisheries impacted by the oil spill. A public meeting addresses an issue or concerns of people living in a particular geographic area. The public learns how the issue is being addressed by government authorities and has an opportunity to both ask questions and to share their concerns and perspectives within their community. No votes or decisions are usually made at public meetings; they usually serve as informational forums.
4. As a class, write the ground rules for the public meeting. Here are some sample ground rules you may use or that can help guide your students in writing their own.
 - Establish a meeting moderator.
The moderator will designate when it is time for each person to speak, and enforce the time limit on speaking and behavior rules
 - Maintain equality.
Each person speaking should be given the same amount of time to speak and equal opportunities to answer questions.
 - Present facts.
All information presented should be based on facts.
 - Maintain Respect.
Respect for others must be maintained throughout the meeting. Citizen role-players should not interrupt statements being given, and should remain civil and respectful to those giving statements.
5. Divide the class into 2 groups: panel members and community members. Decide whether to have students work individually or in pairs. Pass out 1 panel or community member card per individual/pair. Each person/pair reads their card and does additional research to further develop their role. Ask them to record additional research sources on their role card.
6. Give each student a worksheet to fill out. They should use it to guide them in the development of their role-play character. The remainder of class period can be devoted to conduct research for their role or it can be completed as homework.

Class Period 2

1. Set-up the classroom for the mock public meeting. Put chairs and desks at the front for panel members and arrange the seats for the audience. Review the ground rules with the class. Begin the meeting with the moderator and any panel member statements and then take questions from the audience.
2. Twenty minutes before the end of class, stop the public meeting. Engage the students in a discussion about what took place and any immediate lessons learned from the process.

Assessment

Collect and review the students' worksheets. Use these questions to guide your assessment:

- Had they conducted sufficient research to understand their character's job and perspective?
- Was their explanation of their role and perspectives well reasoned?
- Did they develop appropriate questions for the panel?
- Overall, did they represent their role-play character well in the mock public meeting?
- What did they learn about the Gulf spill and the many individuals in a wide range of natural resource and public service jobs deployed by government agencies to address the problem?