

The Issue Campaign

Mary Rouleau
George C. Marshall High School
Falls Church, VA

Abstract

The Issue Campaign seeks to apply classroom information about issues, the Congress, interest groups, and the media to a “real life” campaign designed by the student. Multiple aspects of an issue campaign are addressed, including lobby products and a media/grassroots strategy. The Campaign may be presented in whole or in parts and is designed to exploit a variety of skills including analytical, persuasive and creative.

Applicable NCSS Standards

- ❖ Theme Five: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ❖ Theme Six: Power, Authority, and Governance
- ❖ Theme Ten: Civic Ideals and Practices

The Issue Campaign Teacher Notes

Why This Might Work for Your Class

1. The campaign can be assigned as a whole or in parts, spread over a short or long period of time.
2. It plays to a Multiple Intelligences [MI] approach.
3. It integrates elements of study and is based on what happens in the “real world.” Students could investigate and offer their services to advocacy groups actually working on their issue.
4. It hopefully gets students interested in contemporary issues of value to them and provides incentives to stay tuned in to current events and to vote based on those issues.
5. It, hopefully, will encourage students to believe in their political efficacy (“student power”).

Background and Teacher Oversight Issues

1. This campaign assumes that the basics of the legislative process, interest groups, lobbying, and the media will have been covered.
2. It is suggested that some time be spent on successful student-led movements including civil rights, divestiture from South Africa, and sweatshop campaigns.
3. This project can be done on an individual or a paired basis, playing to the learning style that works best for a student. If pairs are selected, it is suggested that students be allowed to pick partners, more likely increasing their commitment to each other.
4. While this is designed for investigating federal issues, it may be adapted for state issues/processes. However, students should be able to distinguish between the state and federal issues, and guidance may be needed in helping them do so.
5. Bill drafting, a fairly technical exercise if done accurately, is not an element but may be added. The University of Virginia's Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) offers an excellent E-Congress simulation, including a bill-drafting component at its [Youth Leadership](#) site.
6. A gestalt approach to the rubrics included, instead of categorical points, may be more appropriate and less time consuming for the teacher. In any event, the rubrics should help the students figure out what well-developed products should look like.
7. Not all parts may be appropriate for all students. For example, the Q-n-A is a different type of writing than generally produced by most students and may be a difficult format to master in a short time frame. Students who are interested in public policy and/or are better creative writers may do quite well.
8. Teachers should provide guidance on the Media/Grassroots strategy. If your school is in a major media market, students may be accustomed to paid media ads in broadcast and print. In other areas, Congress responds almost exclusively to local events and personal contacts. This should be discussed with the students to provide proper direction on their overall design. Warn students that paid media are very expensive for most interest groups and are used sparingly, if at all. Encourage students to design events or describe research reports that would generate "free" media.
9. The graphic organizers referenced in the instructions generally should be of the wheel-and-spoke or mind-map type for the overall campaign design GO and a timeline or sequential type for the Congressional process GO.

The Issue Campaign: You Will Design a Legislative Campaign!

This Project Has Three Purposes

1. You will demonstrate your understanding of the processes and strategies of Congress and interest groups.
2. You will develop an understanding about a federal issue of interest to you.
3. You will demonstrate your best skills whether analytical, strategic, and/or creative.

Grading Criteria

There are _____ components to this project that will be scored as follows. The total point value for this project is _____.

1. ___ Points = A **graphic organizer [GO] that presents an overview/summary of the key elements of the campaign** including coalition partners, key opponents, media/grassroots strategy, etc.
2. ___ Points = A **3-5 page background paper on the issue** and what Congress should do about the issue
3. ___ Points = A **Q-n-A about the issue** that also anticipates and refutes opponent arguments
4. ___ Points = A **map/GO which describes the expected Congressional process for review**
5. ___ Points = A **brief, but thorough, media/grassroots strategy** description, including as attachments, mock-ups of any paid media, rally materials, etc.
6. ___ Points = An **appropriate “leave behind”**: flier, artifact, etc.
7. ___ Points = A **class presentation** of your campaign

Each component will be graded according to the attached rubrics. Further descriptions of components follow. All work should be submitted using 8 x 11 white paper and fastened as a package. Other format requirements are described below.

Instructions

1. The GO Summary

Many types of graphic organizers may be used here. A few are attached. You may use one of them, search for another, or create one of your own. Review the rubric to include essential elements.

2. Background Paper

The paper should describe the basic issue/problem, why it is important, and what Congress should do about it. **Note:** This must be a federal issue, so when in doubt, ask! The paper should be typed, 3-5 pages in length, double spaced with 1-inch margins, using a font no bigger than 12 point. Sources should be listed at the end in ____ format. Make sure to review the rubric.

3. The Q-n-A

The Q-n-A should present basic but vital information about an issue in a user-friendly format. It is meant to persuade, anticipate and answer questions by the legislator, and anticipate and refute assertions of your opponents. The challenge is to be brief but thorough and to write in a “conversational” style. To be effective, the Q-n-A should not exceed four pages. An excerpt of a “real-life” example is found below. Make sure to review the rubric.

4. Map/GO of Congressional Process

There are several types of maps/GOs that can be used. A few follow below. You may use one of them, search for others, or create your own. Review the rubric for essential elements. You must accurately identify the committees of jurisdiction. Identify in which chamber[s] you will introduce the bill. If in doubt, ask for help! **You will receive extra credit for correct identification of expected key Congressional supporters or opponents.**

5. Media/Grassroots Strategy

The Media/Grassroots Strategy should be a brief but thorough description of how you create and from whom you gather support for your issue. This should include a lobby strategy, at least one public event, and the manner in which you will carry your message to the media. Any expected posters or paid print media should be sketched out. Consult the rubric! **Note: Your use of “paid” media must be realistic. It is expensive, and very few groups have the resources to use paid media.**

6. The “Leave Behind”

You are to create one “leave behind” that would be presented as part of a lobby visit. It can be a flier, a button, or other catchy artifact. It should highlight your issue by using a slogan, visual, etc. If your “Leave Behind” artifact is three dimensional (3D), you may supply it. In any event, you must provide a complete two-dimensional drawing of the “Leave Behind,” including full color. Consult the rubric!

7. Class Presentation

You will do a ____ minute maximum presentation. You should use *PowerPoint*™ or other visual methods to enhance audience understanding and interest. Check out the rubric!

Graphic Organizer (GO) Rubric

Points					Points Earned
Accuracy and Detail	GO does not reflect essential elements of a campaign	GO reflects campaign elements but details are not given	GO reflects elements; accurate details are mostly given	GO reflects elements, and all details are accurate	
Layout Supports Summary	Form of GO is not appropriate	GO format supports summary in part		GO format supports summary	
Presentation	The GO is messy, making work difficult to read		The GO is difficult to read in part	The GO is neat and easy to understand	
Spelling and Capitalization	Several errors		Most spelling and capitalization are correct	All spelling and capitalization are correct	

Teacher Comments and Total Points [out of _____]

Background Paper Rubric

					Points Earned
Issue Understanding	Total lack of understanding	Misinterprets major details	Misinterprets minor details	Demonstrates complete understanding	
Level of Persuasion	Arguments not clear or convincing		Some arguments clear and convincing	All arguments clear and convincing	
Grammar and Format	Did not follow format		Format followed, but grammar errors are present	Format and grammar are correct	
Spelling, Punctuation, and Capitalization	Many errors		Some errors	No significant errors	
References	No references included		References included but incorrect format	References given in correct format	

Teacher Comments and Total Points [out of _____]

Q-n-A Rubric

					Points Earned
Ability to Engage the Reader	Readers are unengaged	Some level of engagement, but work lacks continuity	Generally engages reader	Thoroughly engages reader; conversational	
Completeness	Not in Q-n-A style	Format correct, but fails to address several aspects of the issue	Format correct, but fails to address key aspect of issue	Format correct and addresses all aspects of issue	
Demonstrated Knowledge	Does not understand issue	Shows some understanding of issue	Shows substantial understanding of issue	Complete understanding of issue	
Grammar and Spelling	Many errors	Some errors	Few errors	No major errors	
Opponent Arguments	Many arguments not raised or refuted		Most opponent arguments raised and refuted	All major opponent arguments raised and refuted	

Teacher Comments and Total Points [out of _____]

Congress Process Map/GO Rubric

Points					Points Earned
Accuracy	Few items are correct	Some items are correct	Most items are correct	All items are correct	
Layout and Presentation	Layout is confusing and/or messy, making work hard to read		Layout is generally organized, but information hard to read in part	Layout is organized and easy to read	
Spelling and Capitalization	Several errors		Few errors	All spelling and capitalization correct	
Extra Credit	Key congressional supporters OR opponents identified		Key congressional supporters AND opponents identified		

Teacher Comments and Total Points [out of _____]

Media/Grassroots Strategy Rubric

					Points Earned
Completeness	Little or no integration of components		Fair integration of grassroots and media	Thorough integration of grassroots and media components	
Grassroots Activity	Inappropriate activists and/or lobbying strategy	Some accuracy in identifying activists and lobbying strategy		Accurate identification of activists and lobbying strategy	
Media Activity	Poor or unrealistic use of media	Fair use of media		Good and realistic use of media	
Mock-ups	Little or no description of posters and/or ads	Some description of posters and/or ads		Complete description of posters and/or ads	
Grammar and Spelling	Many errors	Some errors	Few errors	No major errors	

Teacher Comments and Total Points [out of _____]

“Leave Behind” Rubric

Points					Points Earned
Appropriate and accurate	“Leave Behind” was not appropriate OR accurate		“Leave Behind” was appropriate but NOT accurate	“Leave Behind” was appropriate AND accurate	
Creativity	Little or no creativity		Some creativity	Good creativity	
Spelling and Capitalization	Several errors	Some errors		All spelling and capitalization correct	
Follows directions	No “Leave Behind” included		“Leave Behind” not in full color	“Leave Behind” in 3D or full color 2D	

Teacher Comments and Total Points [out of _____]

Presentation Rubric

					Points Earned
Logical	No sequence of information		Some sequence of information	Logical sequence of information	
Content knowledge	Student did not have grasp of information; could not answer questions	Student not comfortable with information; answered only rudimentary questions	Student comfortable with content but unable to answer important questions	Student showed full knowledge and responded to all important questions	
Visuals	Student used no visuals	Visuals did not support presentation well	Visuals supported presentation	Student used visuals to reinforce presentation	
Mechanics	Many spelling and/or grammar errors		Few spelling and/or grammar errors	No major spelling and/or grammar errors	
Delivery	Audience could not hear		Audience could hear but not understand	Student spoke loudly and clearly	

Teacher Comments and Total Points [out of _____]

The Truth about Bankruptcy

[Excerpts from “real-life” lobbying Q-n-A about consumer credit and bankruptcy laws]

The several-years debate over reform of the bankruptcy system has been long on credit industry rhetoric and short on attention to the facts. The credit industry would have you believe that there is widespread, deliberate abuse of the system. There is not. Yet the Bankruptcy Conference report in the 107th Congress (HR 333) would adversely impact honest and hard-working American families facing financial crisis.

Let’s Start at the Beginning:

Who asked for “Reform” of Consumer Bankruptcy Laws? Bankruptcy Judges?

No. The on-going battle over “reform” legislation really began in 1995 with the formation of the National Bankruptcy Review Commission (NBRC). The NBRC was charged by Congress to undertake a review of the bankruptcy laws. For well over a year, the NBRC conducted public meetings throughout the country.

The credit industry was well-represented at those meetings. It pitched a “needs-based” approach to consumer bankruptcy as it did, without success, to Congress for about 30 years, as well as a host of other restrictions on consumers using the system.

Okay, so this is a credit industry effort, but can’t a substantial number of people who file for bankruptcy actually repay their debt?

No. According to a study commissioned by the nonpartisan American Bankruptcy Institute...

Who files for bankruptcy?

Individuals filing for bankruptcy on average earn under \$20,000 a year after taxes. The top three reasons for filing bankruptcy are clear and have not changed.

I’ve been told by the credit industry that HR 333 won’t hurt honest families of modest and low means.

That’s simply not true. There are many provisions in HR 333 that apply to all debtors in bankruptcy, not just those above median income.

It’s my understanding that HR 333 requires debtors to undergo credit counseling before they file for bankruptcy. What’s wrong with that?

There is nothing wrong with encouraging people to seek credit counseling. However, there is a reason for concern with the credit counseling provisions in this bill.

I’ve heard consumer advocates and other opponents of HR 333 say that there are similarities between the tobacco industry and the consumer credit industry. What do they mean?

The similarities are considerable. Both industries rely on “hooking” consumers on a habit that can be dangerous to their well-being. In the case of tobacco companies, it is the smoking of the cigarettes that is the culprit. In the case of consumer lending, it is the easy credit with low

minimum payments. Both industries have been accused of targeting lower income and younger consumers in their marketing campaigns. Smokers who develop health problems get medical treatment. Consumers who get into financial difficulty turn to the bankruptcy system for relief. Now, the credit industry wants to choke off access to the “hospital.” Like people who smoke, some bankruptcy debtors have made unwise choices, but most are vulnerable to unanticipated consequences: job loss, medical expense, divorce. We don’t close the cancer ward to people who smoke; we shouldn’t closer the courthouse doors to people facing financial hardship.

Finally: The consumer credit industry claims that bankruptcies are costing each American family \$400 per year. Is that true?

In a word: No. We are not sure how the credit industry arrived at this figure, but there is no credible evidence to support it.