

Instructions for Role Play

Role-playing is an activity in which students assume the role of another person and act it out. In a role play, students are usually given an open-ended situation in which they must make a decision, resolve a conflict, or act out the conclusion to an unfinished story. Role-playing is designed to promote student empathy and understanding of others. By acting out the role of another individual it is easier to see others' points of view, including how other people think and feel. Role-playing can give students the opportunity to learn behavior appropriate for various situations. Role-playing is also useful for developing critical thinking, decision making, and assertiveness skills.

Procedure

1. **Selection of the Role Play Situation:** There are a number of situations which lend themselves to the use of a role-play. These situations include individual dilemmas (e.g., dealing with a pushy salesperson, observing a crime, or testifying in court) and conflict-resolution situations (e.g., a tenant negotiating with a landlord over the terms of a lease or a police officer confronting a suspected shoplifter). Role-playing can be used to deal with a specific issue or problem; for example, role-playing could be used to discuss whether or not adopted persons should be given access to records that reveal the name and whereabouts of their natural parents. Finally, role plays are useful for developing student skills as an interviewer, negotiator, assertive consumer, investigator, or decision maker.
2. **Preparation and Warm-Up:** Students should be told the situation or problem and instructed as to the various roles. If role-playing is new to the class, "warm-up" or introductory activities may be helpful. For example, students might be asked to role play greeting a long-lost friend, or to role-play the way someone who had just won a large sum of money would act.
3. **Select Participants:** Students can either be assigned roles or the teacher can ask for volunteers. Role plays may be conducted in front of the entire class or a number of simultaneous role plays could be conducted by dividing the class into small groups. Students who do not participate in the role play should act as observers.
4. **Conduct the Role Play:** Direct students to act out the role the way they think someone faced with the same situation would act in real life. The teacher should not interrupt the role play; however, if the students need some help in getting started the teacher should assist the students. After conducting the role-play it is sometimes useful to have students reverse roles or to conduct the same role play using different participants. For example, two students might role play a confrontation between a youth and a police officer. After conducting the role play once, the student who acted as the youth could assume the role of the police officer and vice versa.
5. **Debrief:** The role-play activity should be debriefed and evaluated. This is an opportunity for both the participants and the observers to analyze the role play and to discuss what happened and why. Typical debriefing questions include the following:
 - How did you feel about the role play and each of the various roles?
 - Was the role play realistic? How was it similar to or different from real life? Was the problem solved? If so, how? If not, why not?
 - What, if anything, could have been done differently? What other outcomes were possible?
 - What did you learn from the experience?