

# Rhode Island Mock Trial Tournament

THE RI MOCK TRIAL TOURNAMENT IS A PRODUCTION OF RHODE ISLAND LEGAL/EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

## Hints on How to Prepare for a Mock Trial

The following tips have been developed from previous experiences in training a mock trial team.

- All students should read the entire set of materials and discuss the information/procedures and rules used in the Mock Trial Program.
- The facts of the case, witnesses' testimony, and the points for each side in the case then should be examined and discussed. Key information should be listed on the chalkboard as discussion proceeds so that it can be referred to at some later time.
- Even though a team has to represent only one side in the case during any single trial, all roles in the case should be assigned and practiced. This will help in practicing the case as well as in preparing for future trials.
- Schools should designate alternates for both students and teacher-coaches in order to be prepared for unexpected illness or absence.
- The credibility of the witnesses is very important to a team's presentation of its case. Experience has shown that close decisions in the trial enactments often hinge on individual's differences in witness performance. Therefore, students acting as witnesses really need to "get into" their roles and attempt to think like the persons they are playing. Students who are witnesses should read over their statements (affidavits) many times and have other members of the team or their class ask them questions about the facts until they know them cold.
- Teams should allow their students to prepare their own questions, with the teacher-coach and attorney-coach giving the team continual feedback and assistance on the assignment as it is completed. Based on the experience of these practice sessions, attorneys should revise their questions and witnesses should restudy the arts of their witness statements where they are weak.
- Opening statements also should be prepared by team members. Legal and/or non-legal language should be avoided where its meaning is not completely understood by attorneys and witnesses.
- Closing arguments should not be totally composed before trial, since they are supposed to highlight the important developments for the plaintiff/prosecution and the defense which have occurred during the trial. The more relaxed and informal such statements are, the more effective they are likely to be. Students should be prepared for interruptions by judges who like to question the attorneys, especially during closing arguments.

- As a team approaches the date of its first trial, it is required that the team conduct at least one complete trial as a kind of dress rehearsal. All formalities should be followed and notes taken by the teacher-coach and students concerning how the team's presentation might be improved. A team's attorney-coach should be invited to attend this session and comment on the enactment.
- The ability of a team to adapt to different situations is often a key component in a mock trial enactment, since each judge or lawyer acting as a judge has his/her own way of doing things. Because the proceedings or conduct of the trial often depend on no small part on the judge who presides, student attorneys and other team members should be prepared to adapt to judicial rulings and requests.