

# SPRING 2017 REPORT



The Rendell Center  
*for*

Civics & Civic Engagement

*Inspiring the Next Generation of Citizens*

[rendellcenter.org](http://rendellcenter.org)

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for

## Civics & Civic Engagement

*Inspiring the Next Generation of Citizens*

### Overview:

The 2017 Spring Literacy Based Mock Trial initiative had 26 classes with a total of 930 students participating. Fourteen classes were able to have their culminating event (the trial) at the Federal Courthouse. Four schools were from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Several suburban schools participated including Ithan Elementary in Radnor, Copper Beech in Abington and the Elizabeth Haddon School in Haddonfield, NJ. On average, each class received 4-5 visits from a Rendell Center staffer allowing the Rendell Center to “civically” connect with students for 93 classroom visits.

An important component of the initiative is the use of judges and lawyers in the classroom. The Rendell Center was able to draw upon the resources of 15 lawyers, 15 judges and 5 University of Pennsylvania Law students who graciously gave of their time to work with the classrooms. Some lawyers made multiple visits to the classes. Of the experience working with Lawyers, one 5<sup>TH</sup> grade student wrote:

*Thank you for coming in and sharing your knowledge to the class on lawyers and cases. It was a pleasure to have you and crucial to the script for the criminal case. It was an important experience that helped prepare me as a lawyer for the fake criminal trial. The lesson was extremely helpful and took me several steps further into understanding the case even better than before. Your help was an essential part to development of our roles and characters.*

Books used for the 2017 Initiative included:

- **After Tupac and D Foster** by Jacqueline Woodson
- **Gold Cadillac** by Mildred D. Taylor
- **When You Reach Me** by Rebecca Stead
- **Hoot** by Carl Hiaasen
- **Wolf Hollow** by Lauren Wolk
- **Tuck Everlasting** by Natalie Babbitt
- **To Kill a Mocking Bird** by Harper Lee
- **Outsiders** by S. E. Hinton
- **Call of the Wild** by Jack London
- **Goldilocks**
- **Frindle** by Andrew Clements
- **Shiloh** by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
- **Because of Winn Dixie** by Kate DiCamillo
- **Iqbal** by Francesco D’Adamo

In addition, for the first time, the Rendell Center with the assistance of Ayodele Gansall, Esq developed a simulation/trial on an asylum hearing using primary source documents redacted to protect the clients.

## Teacher Survey

### **1. *In what ways did the Literature-Based Mock Trial Program connect with your classroom curriculum:***

- A direct connection for students to interact with a text in a deeper way.
- We do a great deal of work on character motivation, (What choice did your character make in the text? Why/what made the character react/act this way), and the trial took this thought process and enhanced it.
- The trial aligned with Career Ed. standards for fifth grade (Career Awareness and Preparation, Career Acquisition), Social Studies Standards (American History and Government), English Language Arts (Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, and Thinking).
- The Program enhanced my students' understanding of the judicial system and court procedures. It fit well with civics and logic lessons that we had recently had in class.
- My class read one of the novels that went with the quarterly theme and used it for our Mock Trial. In order to help Anne write the Fact Packet, the children had to have comprehended the story, been able to use the main ideas and supporting details, and summarize what they had read. They also had to analyze the characters and their motives.
- The Literature based trial integrated the core curriculum in a fun-hands on way. A part of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum includes learning about the Judicial System and the Amendments of the constitution. The Social Studies content connected to a novel we read in class. The students were able to make connections to the characters and setting.
- Critical thinking, higher order questioning
- Evaluate an argument
- Analyze how two or more (author's) interpret events
- Evaluate info
- The Literature Based Mock Trial program helped students improve communication skills while learning the legal system and problem solving strategies.

### **2. *In what ways did the Literature-Based Mock Trial Program support the development of student literacy skills:***

- Creating the trial dialogue
- Developing the questions
- Engaging in meaningful conversations regarding the text and trial material
- Students read, reread (excellent bonus point), discussed, and wrote together. Furthermore, it connected seamlessly with our 4Cs initiative (Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity)
- The Program requires students to read critically and find evidence upon which to build their cases. This is a necessary literacy skill—supporting a thesis with excerpts from a text. It also enhanced their writing skills by encouraging them to be succinct and direct in their arguments.
- The children had to go back into the text to find information, analyze the characters, identify motivation and essential information, and write higher-order questions. Most importantly, knowing that they were going to do the Mock Trial gave my students the incentive to really read and comprehend the novel.
- Students had to read, understand, and analyze to support arguments. The trial process brought the students through the entire critical thinking spectrum.
- The students developed higher level thinking skills while critically reading and creating text dependent arguments.

**3. *In what ways did the Literature-Based Mock Trial Program help in developing an understanding of our Judicial System (consider vocabulary, language acquisition, skill in deliberation, etc.):***

- Prior to the trial, we had no experience with how a trial worked, and this experience not only helped us to create the trial dialogue, but we were able to have meaningful conversations about the trials in our area that have been in the news.
- We learned more about our Judicial branch in this exercise than we did all year from our texts and curriculum. I have kids who want to be lawyers, now. This happened during and after the trial; it was a highlight of our year.
- Students reviewed the proper terms for court officials and proceedings. They practiced deliberations and building arguments. By the conclusion of the program, students were able to discuss the case using legal terms.
- This program also encouraged active listening because the jury needed to listen for evidence and evaluate how successfully that evidence supported the claims.
- The novel we read after the Mock trial was *Monster*, and the students used what they had learned to thoroughly discuss the trial. They went in depth, analyzing the witnesses, the lawyers' use of questioning, and whether or not a person under 18 should be given the death penalty. A big area of discussion centered on the idea of felony murder. They did not think a person who was just a "lookout" should be treated the same as the person who actually committed the murder.
- Students learned the vocabulary associated with court systems: direct and indirect questioning, objections, cross-examinations. Public speaking skills were also enhanced through the role-play.
- The students had several opportunities to experience the judicial process, and use vocabulary in context. Students began to converse using vocab skills.
- All of the above. This program gave students the opportunity to explore the ideas they have only read about or seen on TV. This led to many career discussions in the classroom.

**4. *In what ways did the Literature-Based Mock Trial Program support the development of higher level thinking skills (i.e. problem solving, strategic thinking) and leadership skills (i.e. group work, organization, presentation skills):***

- The fact that the students created questions to reveal important information for their side of the argument, and then developed answers to those questions based on their side of the argument hits every aspect of higher thinking skills.
- Our 4Cs initiative (Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Creativity) was evident in each phase of the process, from the pre-thinking, to the reading/writing phase, and throughout the trial simulation. The students showed leadership initiative by helping each other with the tasks of the trial (writing the script and writing questions and answers), generously taking roles that they may not have considered at first, and making sure all details were attended to in a thoughtful yet kindly manner.
- Students were challenged to craft arguments that would hold up under cross-examination. Because of this, they needed to be certain that the evidence they presented was sound. They deliberated amongst themselves as defense and prosecution teams and learned to respect each other's' opinions. They learned how to structure an argument to be most effective and think about the case from both sides. This program also encouraged active listening because the jury needed to listen for evidence and evaluate how successfully that evidence supported the claims. When deliberating, the jury used this information to come to a verdict. It was evident through their discussions that they had listened and considered how the evidence did or did not support each claim.
- The first thing the children did was to brainstorm different scenarios to determine the crime that was committed. Then they had to decide who would be good witnesses for each side and what they could say on the stand that would sway the jurors to their side. Finally, they had to write proper questions in order to elicit the responses they wanted. As they role-played and worked, I noticed that the two children who were usually off task were the ones who contributed the most.

- Students were required to synthesize information they read and apply what they read to the court system. Students were able to put a character on trial and take the case to court! Literally. This hands on activity provided the students with a real life opportunity to become lawyers, judges, and jury members and actually participate in the legal system.
- Students were required to analyze, synthesize, evaluate information from different areas, and they were engaged while doing so!
- Working cooperatively gave the students a safe environment to collaborate and think through the law.

**5. *Please comment on the organization and administration of the program:***

- This was my first year doing this with my class and I were completely blown away by the entire process. Each stage was so well developed in that it gave the students time to process, and to develop an understanding of each phase.
- The staff were all completely professional, and created an atmosphere in which my students were able to really dig into the text.
- Excellent organization and implementation-no issues whatsoever
- The program is well-structured. As we are a bit further from the city than most schools, I was extremely grateful for Ms. Specker's willingness to travel and her efforts to find a judge to come and hear our case.
- From the introduction of the program at the professional development to the actual trial, everything was well organized and student friendly. I was able to contact both Anne and Beth easily, and they were always quick to respond. Anne was always prepared, knowledgeable, and engaging. My students could not wait for her to come each time. They absolutely loved working with her.
- Excellent...Beth Specker communicated clearly, made the workshop fun. Ran very smoothly.
- Excellent, helpful, easy to work with. Everything I needed was met or exceeded
- Perfect

**6. *Please comment on the use of lawyers and judges to assist in the process:***

- The students were so impressed with the ability to work with real live lawyers, and it was so great to see the lawyers interact with the students as they developed their questions. The judge just made the experience so real for the whole class. It was amazing!!!
- The lawyers and the judge were wonderful, age-appropriate, and very good at teaching fifth graders; I was impressed!
- The lawyer who assisted us was terrific with the middle school students. He stated expectations for their work in language they could understand, and they responded well to his direction. He willingly answered questions and assisted them. Our visiting judge also treated the students with respect and carried out the case as if it were a real trial.
- The lawyers were central to the process. They brought knowledge and credibility to what we were doing. They helped the students understand the different types of questions, why they are used, and how to write them. The judge was the icing on the cake.
- Thank you Judge Rendell for allowing our students to visit the Federal Court. The students had a positive experience.
- It was amazing that so many lawyers and judges took the time out to work with us. It was an unforgettable experience!
- I loved having the lawyers participate in this program. The students really enjoyed having the experts guide them through the process

**7. *If you went to the Federal Courthouse, please comment on the process:***

- Everything was organized and well taken care of. Judge Rendell was great with the kids. It was an amazing experience for my students and myself. It was an absolute perfect way to end the program. My students will never forget that experience.



**8. Please share any recommendations for changes to the program:**

- n/a-I hope I can do this again;-)
- I can't think of anything at this time
- I would love the children to have a little more time in the courtroom speaking with the different people about their jobs. I would also love to have them have the opportunity to see an actual trial.
- None

**9. Please share your favorite memory of the program:**

- Watching the kids dress up for their roles and taking the case very seriously. The lawyer who assisted us was terrific with the middle school students. He stated expectations for their work in language they could understand, and they responded well to his direction. He willingly answered questions and assisted them. Our visiting judge also treated the students with respect and carried out the case as if it were a real trial.
- There are so many. My students loved having Anne come in to the classroom and start with her "Minute Mystery." They asked great questions and even answered a couple of them. They enjoyed working with the lawyers, who came and helped them understand the different types of questions used during a trial. But three stand out the most. The first was when one of my special education students, who could never sit still and concentrate, got up, pretended to be the bailiff during role- playing, and then said he had the best time. He participated every time Anne came. He also had a part during the actual Mock Trial. The second was when I saw the look on another student's face when Judge Rueter allowed him to sit next to him and be a co-judge during the trial. The last was when the children went to deliberate. Their analysis of the trial was utterly amazing. They expressed ideas Anne and I had never considered. This program is awesome. I hope to do it again next school year. "Please!"
- When the student attorneys realized they should not put the defendant on the stand because it ruined their case.
- Everyone that worked with us was great with my class. My favorite memory was the kids getting dressed up for their parts when we did the mock trial in my classroom.
- Federal Court House



## 2017 Literature-Based Mock Trials Participants

| School                  | Grade | # students | Teacher              | Book                   | Date Completed | Federal Court House | Judge                 |
|-------------------------|-------|------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| EM Stanton              | 8th   | 30         | Ilene Heller         | After Tupec            | 8-Feb          | Federal Court House | Rendell               |
|                         | 4th   | 35         | Joan Carter Williams | Gold Cadillac          | 15-Jun         | classroom           | Rendell               |
|                         | 6th   | 35         | Ann Olvera           | When You Reach Me      | 15-Jun         | classroom           | Rendell               |
|                         | 2nd   | 30         | Wraith               | Goldilocks             | June           | classroom           |                       |
|                         | 1st   | 60         | Lee, Polce           | Goldilocks             | June           | classroom           |                       |
| Masterman               |       |            |                      |                        |                |                     |                       |
|                         | 5th   | 30         | Marjorie Brunner     | Wolf Hollow            | 15-Mar         | Federal Court House | Rendell               |
|                         | 6th   | 35         | Karen Celli          | Hoot                   | 15-Jun         | Federal Court House | Rendell               |
|                         | 6th   | 35         | Nicole McGeary       | Hoot                   | 15-Jun         | Federal Court House | Rendell               |
|                         | 6th   | 35         | Leanne Fox Jones     | Wolf Hollow            | 15-Jun         | classroom           | Tara Thompson, Esq    |
| Andrew Jackson          |       |            |                      |                        |                |                     |                       |
|                         | 5th   | 40         | Kevin Konya          | Tuck Everlasting       | 13-Mar         | Federal Court House | Rendell               |
|                         | 7th   | 30         | Lauren Pears         | To Kill a Mocking Bird | 17-Mar         | classroom           | Strawbridge           |
| Dunbar                  | 7th   | 15         | Mindy Fisher         | Outsiders              | 20-Mar         | classroom           | McKee                 |
| St. Isidore             | 8th   | 25         | Mary Finnegan        | Outsiders              | 4-May          | classroom           | Koury                 |
| Holy Rosary             | 7th   | 32         | Meredith Elizalde    | Call of the Wild       | 22-May         | classroom           | Kearney               |
| Olney                   | 7th   | 32         | Fleishman            | Iqbal                  | 24-May         | Federal Court House | Reuter                |
|                         | 7th   | 90         | Mary McCullagh       | Immigration            | 19-May         | classroom           | Ayodele Gansallo, Esq |
| Copper Beech            |       |            |                      |                        |                |                     |                       |
|                         | 5th   | 30         | Steve Portman        | Shiloh                 | 7-Jun          | classroom           | Fletcher              |
| Ithan Elementary School | 4th   | 90         | Colleen Zysk         | Goldilocks             | 17-May         | Federal Court House | Baylson               |
|                         |       |            |                      |                        |                |                     | Strawbridge           |
|                         |       |            |                      |                        |                |                     | Rice                  |
| St. Athanasius School   | 5th   | 30         | Brittany Scully      | Frindle                | 8-May          | Federal Court House | Rendell               |
| St. Martha's School     | 7th   | 30         | Kelly Scanlon        | Goldilocks             | 17-May         | classroom           | Savage                |
| Renaissance Academy     | 12    | 30         | Jami Lynch           | Appellate Argument     | 23-May         | Federal Court House | Rendell               |
| Renaissance Academy     | 11    | 41         | Jami Lynch           | Appellate Argument     | 9-Dec          | Federal Court House | Rendell               |
| Elizabeth Haddon School | 4th   | 90         | Cristina Kaubin      | Winn Dixie             | 6-Apr          | Federal Court House | Krause                |
|                         |       |            |                      |                        |                | Federal Court House | McHugh                |
|                         |       |            |                      |                        |                | Federal Court House | Stengel               |
|                         |       |            |                      |                        |                | Federal Court House | Brody                 |
| Total                   |       | 930        |                      |                        |                |                     |                       |

For more information about The Rendell Center's  
Literature-Based Mock Trial program, contact  
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