

Mr. Butts on Trial

Interested in adding a dramatic twist to Kick Butts Day? Perform your own mock trial or funeral for Mr. Butts.

AGE GROUP: middle and high school students

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 15 or more

TIME: 3 to 4 weeks to write, rehearse, and perform

RESOURCES: chairs, tables, computer and printer for writing and printing scripts, simple costumes and props, microphones and speakers

COST: \$0 to \$20, try to keep costs down by using existing school or community center facilities, and props from home or a school drama program. Remember to ask permission and reserve space ahead of time!

In this activity, your group will stage a mock trial. The cast includes a judge, witnesses, jury members and a police officer to swear in the witnesses. This is a good way to entertain and educate your audience and attract media attention.

The leading roles are:

- The defendant, Mr. Butts, a tobacco icon who is charged with targeting youth, killing hundreds of thousands of Americans per year, addicting many more and causing many deadly diseases.
- The prosecuting attorneys try to prove the dangers of cigarette smoking, show how addictive tobacco really is, and show how Big Tobacco targets and manipulates youth to try to get them to use their product.
- The defense attorneys argue that smoking is a personal choice and deny all other accusations.

This activity is a unique way to gain the attention and win the support of elected officials, the public, and the press (see the media section on for tips on getting coverage.) When doing this activity, be sure to research this topic well enough to make strong arguments using correct facts. You can check out tobaccofreekids.org for fact sheets.

The success of this activity depends on preparation - particularly those playing the attorneys and witnesses - and their scripted arguments. Be sure to put personality into it. You can make it interesting, comical, and educational by using different court settings like we see on T.V. with the rude and humorous judges. It's important to practice and get your act together before the trial takes place. You can ask your art and drama teachers to help with costumes, props, and stage directions, and your social studies teacher to help with preparing the arguments.

Start planning and writing the script at least a few weeks in advance, if not more. Make sure to reserve the location, whether it's a school stage or gym, a park, the town hall or Capitol steps. Don't forget to draft media materials and send them to the press before your event. See our media section for tips.

The following is an outline of the trial process used by Peers Against Tobacco, a youth tobacco control coalition based in Napoleonville, LA. They performed this trial at their Kick Butts Day Rally held at the Louisiana State Capitol in Baton Rouge.

Introduce and inform your audience about the case. Have some theme music in the background. An exciting opening will set the stage for your trial against Mr. Butts.

Opening Statements

- The tired and aggravated judge calls the court to order and announces the case to be heard.
- Prosecution and defense attorneys give opening statements, presenting highlights of the arguments they will use to persuade the jury as to the defendant's guilt or innocence.
- Make sure that the defense attorneys are very slick in presenting their case. They should come off as sneaky, while the prosecution should be portrayed as enraged and powerful speakers.

Prosecution

- The prosecution calls its first witness, a representative from a public health group like the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, the American Cancer Society, or your own youth coalition.
- The witness is sworn in by a police officer (as are all subsequent witnesses). A prosecuting attorney questions the witness.
- A defense attorney cross-examines the witness (and all subsequent witnesses for the prosecution). The second witness is a scientist or doctor. This witness tells of the harmful effects of tobacco, and how many of the lung cancer cases that they treat are caused by tobacco use.
- During questioning the prosecution submits Exhibit A, a photograph comparing a healthy lung to a diseased lung, and Exhibit B, a jar of tar equal to the amount of tar a pack a day smoker would inhale each year.
- The prosecution calls and questions its third witness, a 28-year-old ex-basketball player and smoker with lungs of a 60-year-old.

Defense

- The defense calls its first witness, a spokesman for a major tobacco company. The witness is questioned by a defense attorney.
- A prosecuting attorney cross-examines the witness (and all subsequent witnesses for the defense) and presents Exhibit C, a tobacco industry document including an admission that nicotine is addictive.
- Then the attorney introduces Exhibit D, additional tobacco industry documents admitting that they focus on youth as their marketing target.
- The second witness for the defense is a member of the Smokers' Rights Group. The witness is questioned by a defense attorney about Americans' right to smoke.
- The defense questions its final witness, Mr. Butts, who describes his occupation as "bringing relaxation and happiness to many people."

Closing Arguments and Charge to Jury

- A defense attorney delivers a closing statement, summarizing arguments about the benefits cigarettes bring to individual smokers and the U.S. economy.
- A prosecuting attorney delivers a closing statement, summarizing arguments about the addictive nature and dangerous health effects of tobacco use, as well as the lies and manipulation spread by the tobacco industries.
- The judge, now ready to go home, summarizes the charges against Mr. Butts and tells the jury to decide whether the defendant is guilty.

Verdict and Sentencing

- After the jury meets briefly to decide its verdict, the judge asks for the jury's decision. The jury announces its verdict: Guilty on all counts!
- The judge imposes the sentence of life in prison and the court adjourns.

Bury Mr. Butts: Mock Funeral

- For a special touch, you can hold a mock funeral for Mr. Butts – be totally creative with your funeral! One youth advocate can play the role of Mr. Butts, dressing up as a cigarette and lying in the coffin. Others can be the pastors and eulogizers, taking turns speaking about the dangers of tobacco use. Everyone else can be the guests at the funeral, either wearing cigarette costumes like Mr. Butts or pretending to be people suffering from tobacco-caused diseases (e.g., coughing or wheezing to emulate the initial symptoms of emphysema)