

The Advocacy Game

Welcome



EDUCATIONAL
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presents

The Advocacy Game

An improv game to help theatre educators, students and other advocates “make the case” before legislators, administrators, school boards, and other decision makers. Get in the game for theatre education!



The Advocacy Game is an improv exercise in which the scene partners are the “Askers” and the “Target Audience.” The Askers are seeking to persuade one or more Target Audience members to support their request regarding theatre education. The rules of the game, listed below, are not hard and fast. Do what works for you. Just remember that anyone can play—teachers, students, parents, or anyone else seeking to “make the case” for theatre education.

The rules

There are four components to the game, each of which is included here:

- A. **The Scenarios** are the short, imagined situations upon which game participants can improvise.
- B. **The Facts, Figures, and Quotes** are intended to help Askers build their case and allow the Target Audience to prepare a counter argument.
- C. **The Dozen Do's of Advocacy** is a checklist that participants and observers can use to measure the effectiveness of a presentation.
- D. **The Dozen Don'ts of Advocacy** are the things you probably shouldn't say in an advocacy pitch.

The steps:

1. Divide into groups; each group draws a random Scenario situation from a hat (or is assigned one) and chooses a group leader.
2. Each group member is assigned a character role. Some will be “Askers,” and others will play roles of the “Target Audience.”
3. The Askers and Target Audiences for each Scenario prepare independently of each other, using the Dozen Do's and Facts, Figures, and Quotes sheets.
4. The Askers focus on creating a carefully reasoned presentation as to why the Target Audience should support what they are requesting.
5. The Target Audience prepare by making a list of reasons why they cannot support or agree to the request being made, based on the given Scenario.

Suggested preparation time is ten to fifteen minutes, and presentation time is ten to twelve minutes, depending how many groups (and available time) you have.

After each presentation, using the Dozen Do's as a rubric, spend some time discussing how well the Askers made their case and the likelihood that the Target Audience was influenced by the appeal.



The seven scenarios presented here each address a different need and varying “Askers” and “Target Audiences.” You know your own program best—what you need and who the decision-makers are that can help you get it. Once you’ve mastered the fundamentals of the game, create your own scenarios and get students invested! We all know that this kind of rehearsal can make for a better performance. The only difference is that an advocacy improv can reflect a real-life need that might make the difference as to the kind of theatre education your students will have next year and beyond.

Note: We’ve laid these out in a fashion that will allow you to print and cut them apart for the game.

Asker: teacher

Target Audience: parent

Scenario 1: A parent of one of your best performance students has removed that student from the acting class and forced him or her to enroll in calculus instead. The student has requested that you meet the parent in hopes you will be able to persuade him or her why the student should stay in the acting class.

Askers: 3-5 students

Target Audience: principal and curriculum director

Scenario 2: A longtime theatre teacher has been told that her advanced acting class will be eliminated in the coming year and she will be expected to tutor students preparing for state English exams during that period. Her advanced students have requested a meeting with the principal and the curriculum director to ask that the acting class be restored.

Askers: two students, a parent, and a teacher

Target Audience: superintendent of schools and president of the school board

Scenario 3: A levy has failed and the school board has decided that cuts must be made. They have decided to allow theatre productions but only as an extra-curricular activity. It is your job to make a case for keeping theatre arts in the curriculum.



Askers: teacher and 1-2 students

Target Audience: parent association president and treasurer

Scenario 4: Your school has been selected to perform on the mainstage of the Thespian Festival in Lincoln, Nebraska. You need to raise funds to make the trip with your students and chaperones. You're meeting with the president and treasurer of the school parent association to seek their support.

Askers: 3-5, a mix of teaching artists and students

Target Audience: 1 legislator

Scenario 5: The state legislature has a pending bill that will cut the annual funding to the state arts council by 70 percent. There is a strong commitment among the legislature to fund only programs that create jobs. Among other things, the state arts council funds a theatre education outreach program that places teaching artists in rural and urban schools that have little or no arts presence. The proposed cuts would likely end those programs. Teaching artists from the outreach program and a few students they worked with are trying to convince their district's state representative to vote against the bill.

Asker: teacher, student, and parent volunteer

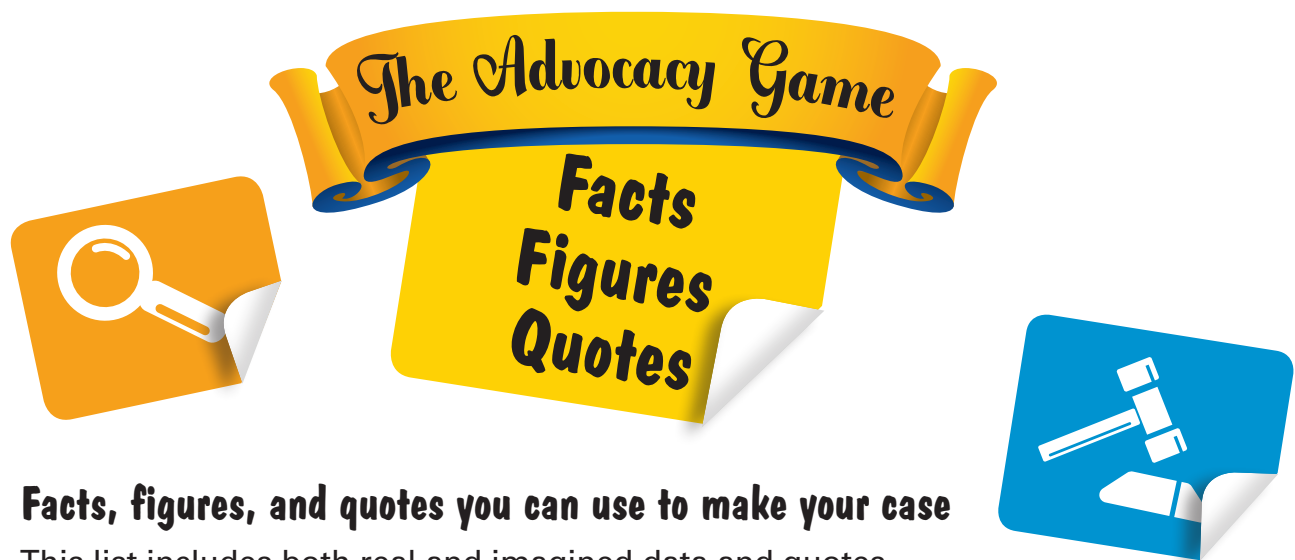
Target Audience: principal and school communications coordinator

Scenario 6: Your Thespian Troupe has been awarded the EdTA Outstanding School award. You want to school to honor the theatre program and your Thespians with a school-wide proclamation, and to create and issue a press release in which the school principal and district superintendent acknowledge the award with a formal statement.

Askers: the program director and 2 students

Target Audience: state superintendent

Scenario 7: An annual state-sponsored education program brings theatre students from around the state to train and work as interns in the state's premiere professional regional theatre. The state budget for the coming year has been severely cut and does not include funding for the program. The program's director and two past student participants are meeting with the state education commissioner to see if he or she can help save the program.



Facts, figures, and quotes you can use to make your case

This list includes both real and imagined data and quotes.

The starred quotes are examples of data that a theatre educator might regularly gather from his or her own school records for use in an advocacy presentation. While reliable national data and prominent spokespersons can be a persuasive part of any advocacy pitch, the most powerful stories and facts are those that you gather from your own students, parents, and other program supporters.

1. **"I have a statement of support signed by the parents of 200 current students who are either currently enrolled in my classes or who intend to urge their children to enroll next year."*
2. The 2009 study by Dr. James Catterall, *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art* found that young adults aged 26-29 are much more likely to be engaged in civic activities, including arts participation, political fundraising, and volunteerism, and are pursuing careers that they feel are good for their well being and society.
3. "Our future as an innovative country depends on ensuring that everyone has access to the arts and to cultural opportunity....But the intersection of creativity and commerce is more than economic stimulus, it's about who we are as a people."—**Michelle Obama**
4. **"In the past five years, the students enrolled in our theatre classes have had a 100 percent graduation rate."*
5. "The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) defines the arts as a core subject, and the arts play a significant role in children's development and learning process."—**Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in a 2009 letter to school and education leaders**
6. "The study of drama, dance, music, and the visual arts helps students explore realities, relationships, and ideas that cannot be conveyed simply in words or numbers."—**Secretary Arne Duncan, in the introduction of *Reinvesting in Arts Education*, the 2011 President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities report**
7. The 2007 poll *The Imagination Nation*, found that nine in ten of 1,000 people polled said that healthy imaginations in young people contribute significantly to a nation's ability to compete in the global economy, with 88 percent of respondents expressing the view that arts education is an essential component toward developing that imagination.
8. **"Ninety-five percent of students enrolled in our theatre classes in the past ten years have gone on to college. Eighty-seven percent of those students have completed their degrees, with majors ranging from engineering and pre-med to theatre education and accounting."*
9. The 2008 Dana Foundation study, *Learning, Arts, and the Brain*, by neuroscientists and psychologists at seven universities, found that training in the arts contributes to improved general thinking skills of children and adults.



10. *"Our program includes an outreach component that works to integrate special-needs students into our classes and productions."
11. "An equation is like a script—acting taught me how to read equations."—**Jacob Shaman, physicist**
12. "Where the arts are an integral component of the school day, they positively impact student attendance, persistence and engagement; enhance teacher effectiveness; and strengthen parent and community involvement." **From the AEP brochure, *What School Leaders Can Do to Increase Arts Education***
13. *"More than 5,000 community members attended our productions last year, which allowed us to cover 60 percent of our production costs through ticket sales."
14. "The arts are among society's most compelling and effective paths for developing 21st century skills in our students." **From the introduction to *The Partnership for 21st Century Skills Arts Skills Map*, a matrix of arts classroom lessons demonstrating thirteen skills and outcomes in grades 4, 8 and 12.**
15. *"Last year, our program produced a cross-curricular production of *Fiddler on the Roof* that brought together students and teachers from the visual arts, history, and social studies departments as well as community members from three area churches and synagogues."
16. *"Our program regularly presents children's theatre production in area elementary schools that have little or no theatre opportunities, and we produce an annual fall and spring revue that tours to schools and nursing homes."
17. *Ready to Innovate*, the 2010 Conference Board report, found that ninety-five percent of executives felt the most valuable skill that new workers should possess is creativity. Eighty-three percent said that they trouble finding workers who have that skill.
18. "The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is important."—**Elliot Eisner, from *Ten Lessons the Arts Teach***
19. *"Our 2010 production of *The Laramie Project* received the Cappies Award for best drama of year, and gained state-wide press for our post-show talkbacks with community members about the need for tolerance and understanding of the gay community."
20. "There have been studies dating back a hundred years that document the connection between arts avocation and Nobel Prize winners in science. Arts involvement is a predictor of success in the sciences."—**Robert Root-Bernstein, writing in *Sparks of Genius*.**
21. *"Our school-wide survey conducted last year of other core subject area teachers found significantly higher academic achievement among at-risk students who had also participated in theatre classes and/or productions for the first time, as well as lower truancy rates and fewer behavioral issues."
22. The 2008 National Endowment for the Arts study, *Artists in the Workforce*, showed that individuals involved in the arts account for \$70 billion aggregate annual income. The study said that 1.4 percent of the U.S. labor force are employed as artists, only slightly less than the total number of active-duty and reserve personnel in the U.S. military



The dozen do's of advocacy

Here's a checklist of twelve things that advocates should consider as part of a meeting with their target audience. Each point can make the difference between a successful and failed ask, whether you're making a request to save a class or a job, or simply trying to grow an already well-supported program.

- ☐ Know your facts and figures
- ☐ Have your own story
- ☐ Make your pitch personal to your audience
- ☐ Know your audience
- ☐ Know exactly what you want
- ☐ Have a core message in a 30-second pitch
- ☐ Be respectful of your audience and their time
- ☐ Persuade—don't argue
- ☐ Be prepared for pushback
- ☐ Try, try again
- ☐ Leave something behind
- ☐ Evaluate your efforts



A dozen things you shouldn't say

It's easy to get caught up in an emotional argument when you feel so strongly about something. Your target audience is going to respond more positively to a well-organized presentation that includes the kind of information suggested in the Advocacy Game's Facts, Figures, and Quotes page. Here's a dozen things you probably shouldn't say in an advocacy pitch:

- ☐ You can't cut my program or my job—I belong to the union.
- ☐ You're doing this because I didn't give your daughter the lead in "Millie" last year.
- ☐ You had plenty of money last year for new football uniforms.
- ☐ My kids need me.
- ☐ We've already paid for the rights to shows next year.
- ☐ Everybody likes our program.
- ☐ Our program is a lot of fun—it gives students a break from academics.
- ☐ My kids will drop out if we don't have a theatre program.
- ☐ If you came to the shows once in awhile you would understand what we do.
- ☐ You've been trying to get rid of our program for years.
- ☐ I know you don't like some of the shows we produce, but you can't make everybody happy.
- ☐ I work fourteen hours a day and I don't understand why anyone would think our theatre kids aren't important.