

The Case of Plastics: Introduction

The Case of Plastics is a role-playing game that will ask you to consider the positive and negative aspects of plastics. Through this process you will use research and debate to explore the science, history, and controversies surrounding plastics.

Plastics have made a wide range of goods available to consumers at low prices, raising the standard of living for many people. Plastics have also improved health and sanitation and reduced demand on scarce natural resources. They are essential to the way we live our lives in the 21st century. Yet problems of waste and disposal, consumption of fossil fuels and release of CO₂ in the production of plastics, and the toxicity of additives used in plastics create concerns that plastics may be dangerous and unsustainable. During this game you will explore the many points of view about plastics and present arguments to your classmates about the place of plastics in our lives.

The Scenario

Congress, having determined that the problem of plastic waste needs to be addressed at the federal level, has given the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the task of developing a regulation to reduce plastic waste. EPA Regulators have drafted outlines for the new regulation and are convening a hearing of experts from all sides of the plastics debate to provide comments, suggestions, and feedback. You will be playing either one of the Regulators or one of the invited experts, each with a strong point of view about plastics and about what should and should not be included in the regulation.

How to Play

As one of the experts testifying at the EPA Hearing, it is your goal to convince the Regulators that the final regulation should reflect your character's position on plastics. You will be working with a group of like-minded experts, your interest group, to develop the most convincing arguments possible.

First, you must learn as much as you can about your interest group's positions so you can effectively argue for them. Then you will meet with your group to prepare answers to questions the Regulators might ask, arguments for your positions, and counterarguments to the positions the other groups will present. All of these arguments should be based on evidence from your research.

At the Hearing each group will briefly present its position before responding to questions from the Regulators. Each group will have the chance to respond to each question and to the other groups, so you must be prepared to explain not only your own position but also where you disagree with the positions of other groups.

After the Hearing you will develop your position into a more concrete list of recommendations for the final regulation. In a final Debate you will present and argue for your group's proposal. At the conclusion of the Debate the Regulators will select one group's proposal to adopt into the official regulation. Each interest group will be ranked based on how well its goals are represented in the final regulation. You will receive points if your regulation is selected and points based on your group's ranking.

If you are a Regulator, it is your job to decide which group and which regulation is most persuasive. You must research carefully, ask thoughtful questions, and pay close attention throughout the game.