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**Romeo & Juliet Found Innocent!**

*Robinson & Cole Teaches Monument High School Students about  
Trial Advocacy in Boston's Federal Court*

**Boston** – April 13, 2007 – Two star-crossed lovers escape guilt, though an astonished Friar Lawrence isn't so lucky. For a second year in a row, Robinson & Cole's Boston office teamed up with students from Boston's Monument High School as they entered into Shakespeare's fair Verona and read *Romeo & Juliet*. For most of the students in Ms. Megan Wise's ninth-grade English classes, this was their first experience with Shakespeare. The Robinson & Cole "e-Pals" program, organized by Robinson & Cole's Vickery Hall Kehlenbeck and Monument's Jonathan Sproul, was developed in cooperation with the WriteBoston program of Mayor Thomas Menino's office. The program pairs lawyers and staff with the ninth graders at Monument, a school with an innovative focus on criminal justice and public safety. The trials, held at Boston's Federal District Courthouse, were the highlight of the students' study of the play. For several weeks prior to this culmination, students exchanged weekly e-mails with their e-Pals to discuss universal themes explored in the play, including the meaning of trust, love, and family.

The Mock Trial lesson plan was created by Robinson & Cole's Melissa D'Alelio, a former high school English teacher turned attorney. D'Alelio worked with Wise to build the project, which compels students to take on the defense or prosecution of one of Shakespeare's unforgettable characters and craft a written position paper on how that character was or was not to blame for the deaths of the young lovers. Among other things, the project forces students to draft well-organized papers that draw "supporting evidence" in the form of quotes from the play, make use of counter arguments, parallel construction, connecting adverbs, and strategically placed rhetorical questions.

After students polished their "defense" or "prosecution," D'Alelio, along with attorneys John Tener and Catherine Reuben, headed into the classroom to teach students about transforming

their paper into oral presentations. With a little demonstrative help from the movie *My Cousin Vinny*, the Robinson & Cole crew worked one-on-one with students, aided by the class' student teacher Carrie Kotecki, teaching them about courtroom etiquette and delivering a persuasive argument employing appropriate tone, volume, and body language. Wise enthusiastically notes: "It was an amazing class! The students were raving about their classroom visitors and were inspired to work harder than usual."

When the big day arrived, students dressed the part, sporting briefcases, suits, and even suspenders. After the nervous jitters passed, students gave persuasive and passionate presentations, working co-operatively with their group members to advocate for their fictitious clients before the Robinson & Cole judge, clerk, and jury, who also evaluated the students' presentations. Kehlenbeck explains, "The trials brought the play to life for the students and increased their enthusiasm for reading, helping them become more comfortable expressing their thoughts, and raising their awareness that there is often more than one legitimate point of view on an issue." Some students even crafted handouts for the jury and used video-evidence.

Hours after the verdicts were read and the brief cases were closed, students still spoke fervently about the experience. Wise and D'Alelio were ecstatic over the project's success. D'Alelio notes, "It's exciting to watch this project unfold. The students are so engaged and committed. They are learning so much. You can see it. That's pretty extraordinary."

For 160 years, Robinson & Cole has actively supported and participated in initiatives that enrich the community. The firm is especially proud of their many employees who contribute their time, enthusiasm, leadership, fundraising, and support to a wide range of community and charitable activities.

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