

II. The Quality of Life in Our Town

WHAT?

Students will examine their town and its relative strengths and weaknesses.

WHY?

To distinguish fact from opinion

To explain ways in which geographic factors have affected the political, economic, and social development of Texas

To analyze their hometowns and the impact of human activities on the natural environment of the state

To move beyond global judgment (this is a nice place to live, or this is a sorry town) into a more thoughtful judgment of specific elements that interact to form their town

To describe how people from selected racial, ethnic, and religious groups attempt to maintain their cultural heritage while adapting to the larger Texas culture

To draw conclusions

To encourage divergent thinking about a common issue

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills addressed in this lesson:

Geography:

- Understand the location and characteristics of places and regions of Texas
- Understand the effects of the interaction between humans and the environment in Texas

Government:

- Understand the basic principles reflected in the Texas Constitution
- Understand the structure and functions of government created by the Texas Constitution

Citizenship:

- Understand the rights and responsibilities of Texas citizens
- Understand the importance of the expression of different points of view in a democratic society

Culture:

- Understand the concept of diversity within unity in Texas

Social Studies Skills:

- Apply critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources including electronic technology.

Communicate in written, oral, and visual form

- Uses problem-solving and decision making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings

TAAS:

- Objective 1: Civic Values and Responsibilities
- Objective 2: Economic Influences on U. S. History
- Objective 3: Political Influences on U. S. History
- Objective 4: Geographic Influences on U. S. History
- Objective 6: Sociological and Cultural Influences on U. S. History
- Objective 8: Critical-Thinking Skills

Activity 2



Interactive Lessons in Government

HOW?

Materials needed:

- One copy per student of the Quality of Life continuum worksheet
- If you wish, a bulletin board space with a continuum line on it

Suggested Teaching Time: 30 minutes

Suggested Procedures:

1. **Introduce the concept of a continuum.** Explain how it is more expressive than a simple yes-no answer because it allows the student the chance to show shades of opinion. Perhaps do an example or two of how to use a continuum.

- a. Let's imagine that the continuum will be used to measure opinions about who should be allowed to vote in elections.

Voters should include:

X _____ X
 Everyone No one

- b. Most people will not think that every living person should be allowed to vote, so very few people would mark an X at the far left of the continuum. On the other hand, very few people believe that no one should have the right to vote. Where you place your mark will reflect which side of the continuum expresses your opinion best. Try not to place your mark in the very middle; instead try to show which side of the continuum reflects your general idea about the issue.

2. **Hand out the Quality of Life continuum worksheets and ask students to complete them.** Circulate among desks to field questions, especially if students have not tried out this type of task before.

3. Ask students to suggest one or two of the items that seem most interesting to them. Discuss these as a class.

- a. One approach is to indicate a continuum on the floor and ask students to take a stand at the point on the continuum that expresses their opinion. Then have students on either side of the continuum give their best factual evidence to support their positions. You will probably want to rotate between the sides, as in an informal debate, to allow each side a chance to express its views. Ask students to stay focused on specific facts to support their ideas, either gathered from the news or personal observation, such as a specific park's attractions, or huge potholes on a particular road, or an instance of excellent medical care. Help students distinguish the benefits and drawbacks of anecdotal accounts to support their generalizations.

- b. Another approach is to use a bulletin board continuum. Label the extreme positions on the continuum and then have the students tape, tack, or staple their opinions on the board. Have students write their names on index cards or other small papers and use these to mark their positions on the continuum. The bulletin board might look like this (in abbreviated form!):

Voters should include:

Bob		Maria Yvette Mike
Joe Susan Jose		James Barbara
X _____ X		
Everyone No one		

- c. Inevitably there is a student who is shy about stating an opinion, does not feel he or she knows enough to express an opinion, or is genuinely stumped by the task. These students can be super valuable to your discussion. You can direct the students who do have opinions to try to persuade the undecided students. The undecided pupils have as their task to determine which argument was most persuasive. These undecided folks may still not have an opinion they are willing to share, but they can give feedback about the different arguments offered by others. If the undecided ones do wish to state an opinion after the discussion, allow them to do so. Also, if students wish to change their position on the continuum, allow this to be done, too. If there is a mass change, examine with students the reasons for their change of opinion.

Follow-Up Possibilities: You may wish to leave the continuum up for all your classes, so that students can see 1) the questions of interest to the other classes, and 2) how people they know stood on the question. Leaving the continuum up for several days inevitably sparks lively discussion about why people voted as they did, who changed their minds, and so forth- just the kind of lively civic discussion our communities need.

You could also invite students to bring in evidence to support their opinions and place that on the bulletin board. They might cut out articles and editorials from the town newspaper, bring in photographs or informative pamphlets, or conduct their own informal polls and bring back quotations from residents in town or other students. Then have students evaluate the relative strength of each form of evidence, and decide whether it is a fact or an opinion.

Evaluation: You could grade the continuum itself, or have students do a writing assignment that extends that lesson. For example, you could ask students to write a paragraph about “The Best (or Worst) Thing about Our Town” in which they expand upon their ideas and defend their overall judgments.