

I. Municipal Government Discovery

1 Activity

WHAT?

An introductory lesson that familiarizes the students with the various components of municipal government. This lesson presents a challenge and allows students a chance to approach the challenge, and discuss their results and the ways they approached the problem. This lesson will help students realize that their way of seeing a problem, even if it is different from the way others see it, is helpful in the process of learning.

Just as every town in Texas is unique in the way it prioritizes, sets up the local government power structure, and designs ordinances to meet the special needs of the community, so each student working on this assignment will see the assignment differently.

WHY?

- To stimulate student curiosity about municipal government
- To help begin thinking about the possibilities of governing their town
- To develop an orderly way of categorizing issues and seeing interrelationships among ideas
- To develop critical thinking skills and develop an awareness of their own thinking processes
- To encourage divergent thinking about a common issue

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills addressed in this lesson:

Government:

- 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
- Understand the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society

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



HOW?

Materials Needed:

- Index cards
- Chalkboard or overhead projector
- Municipal word list

Suggested Teaching Time: 45-50 minutes

Suggested Procedures:

1. **Focus the students to begin thinking about words that relate to municipal government.**
 - a. As students enter the classroom, hand each student an index card with one item related to municipal government on the card. Use the attached list. Include the items that might be found in your town.
 - b. You may wish to have the cards already on the desks with instructions on the chalkboard to begin thinking about what is on the index card.
2. **Familiarize the students with the process and the concept of identifying meaningful relationships.**
 - a. You may wish to have students recall how difficult it would be to function in a world without organized categories of things, ideas, places, and so forth. You may mention categories of organization that they may take for granted in such places as grocery stores *(produce, canned foods, baked goods, cleaning supplies, etc.), school (grades, departments offices), or textbooks (units, chapter, subsections). The difficulty of using disorganized information or things in these settings will be obvious.
 - b. You may wish to model a practice session on how to create categories out of chaos. With the whole class, work out on the chalkboard or overhead projector a sample using words that you make up or the following sample words.

apple, sandwich, green, spaghetti, castle, yellow, mansion, olive, mobile home, hamburger, blue, spinach, red, banana, tent, blueberry, apartment, pizza

The goal is to have students move beyond a simple matching of pairs of words (apples are red, or apple goes with banana) into thinking about many possible groupings for the words. Students will come up with varied groups: foods, fruits, Italian foods, colors, housing, things that are green (yellow, red). Some of the categories may overlap (foods and fruits) or be sub-categories of a more inclusive heading (housing, nomadic housing).

3. **Give students practice in discovering categories for a more complex and novel list of items related to the new unit about municipal government.** This part of the lesson is done with the entire class working together to determine how to group themselves in a meaningful way.
 - a. Instruct students to interview each other to discover what other items are on the index cards. Students will then begin to group themselves into meaningful relationships determined by the item on the cards.
 - b. You may wish to give limited direction toward categories such as “things we have in our town” and “things we do not have”, or “related jobs” or “related signs or structures”. Try not to allow more than five to eight minutes for this activity, to force students to act on their hunches and first impressions.
 - c. Allow one or two minutes for the groups to identify and agree on their category.
4. **Have students share their discoveries with the class.** Remind students that there are no right answers, only different answers or answers that seem more useful or meaningful. List student-created categories on the board along with their relationship to that category. Ask which items in this activity were the most difficult to categorize and why.

- Possible categories include:

people who work in our town
 town buildings
 ways of communicating
 city services
 taxes
 paying for things
 people
 places
 necessities
 things you see in a town
 things related to elections
 big city features
 small town features

5. **Reflect on the thinking process that the students used to develop their categories.**

- Have one student explain his or her approach to the task in detail, and then solicit the approaches used by other students.
- Write the steps that the students used on the overhead projector.
 - Students will likely not be accustomed to reflecting on the process of how they did an assignment once they have finished it. Remind them that if they had success on the task, they will want to be able to repeat their success, so they should be aware of HOW they succeeded, not only THAT they succeeded.
 - Remind students that throughout their lives, they will need to figure out how to do new things, and they will be more successful if they start actively reflecting on how a process evolved.
 - **Ways that students approached the problem might include:**
 - trying to find as many items as possible by talking to many of the students
 - trying to find one other person who had an item similar to mine
 - trying to discover any pattern
 - trying to figure out broad categories and then find students who matched any of the broad categories.
- Discuss how students dealt with the task when they could find any relationship between the items.
 - Did they continue to discuss possible relationships or did they move on to another person?
 - If a student ran into problems approaching the task, brainstorm with the class ways to solve a similar task in the future.
- Ask students to try to identify what “clicked” in their minds when they “got the hang” of the assignment. Go into the specifics of how far along they were in the assignment, which items they had trouble with, which items seemed really obvious, and so forth.

6. **Have students devise a fitting title for their categories.** Share ideas as a class.

Follow-Up Possibilities: As warm-up activities on subsequent days, put up some words learned in the previous day’s lesson. Have students figure out the category that joins the words together conceptually.

Evaluation: You may wish to give students credit for class participation.