

# V. The Mayor and the City Council

## WHAT?

Students will analyze the duties and responsibilities of mayors and the city councils. They will apply information through a simulated city council meeting.

## WHY?

- To determine the difference between elected officials and employed leaders of the community
- To identify the duties of a mayor and a city council
- To analyze issues that come before the mayor and city council
- To describe a town's organizational structure
- To engage in a decision-making process regarding a typical issue that comes before a mayor and city council

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills addressed in this lesson:

### *Government:*

- Understand the role of public officials
- Understand the basic structure and functions of local government

### *Citizenship:*

- Understand the impact of individual and group decisions on communities in a democratic society.
- Understand the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society
- Understand the importance of individual participation in the democratic process

### *Social Studies Skills*

- Apply critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources including electronic technology
- Communicate effectively in a variety of forms
- Use problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others in a variety of settings

## TAKS:

- Objective 4: Political Influences on Historical Issues and Events
- Objective 5: Critical-Thinking Skills

## HOW?

### Materials Needed:

- Copies of the handout Venn diagram titled “The Mayor and the City Council”
- Copies of the handout “The Mayor and City Council at Work”
- Handout titled “Answer Key for ‘The Mayor and City Council at Work’”
- Pictures of the mayor and city councilmen of the students’ town (If available)
- City Council Meeting Role playing cards in the handout titled “Roles for the Mock City Council Meeting”

**Suggested Advance Preparations:** Arrange for the mayor or a city councilman of the students’ town to visit the classroom to:

- Speak to the class about the offices of mayor and city councilman  
OR
- Observe the students as they engage in a simulated city council meeting and give feedback to the students about their procedures.

### Suggested Procedures:

1. Ask students what a mayor of a town does. Discuss their answers.
2. Ask students what a city council does. Discuss their answers. Explain that some towns are too small to have a city council. Some towns do not have a mayor. They have a city manager-city council system of government. A city manager is hired by the city to help its operations run smoothly. A mayor is elected by the people and gives the town leadership.
3. In pairs or groups, have students complete the Venn diagram titled “the Mayor and the City Council” using information on the handout titled “The Mayor and City Council at Work.”
4. Conduct a class discussion about mayors and city council members. Explain that the mayor and city council members usually have other jobs and are paid only a small amount for their services. For example, in an average sized town, a city council member might receive \$10.00 per meeting the member attends. A mayor might receive \$50.00 per month. In very large cities, the mayor would receive a salary because his duties would require his or her full attention.
5. Brainstorm the issues a mayor and city council might be concerned about. Lead students to include the following examples:
  - A city’s paid personnel and volunteers who serve on boards such as the library board or a committee such as a fine arts committee.
  - Building and maintaining streets
  - Creating and extending city services such as water lines
  - Approving activities of various city departments such as the Parks and Recreation Department installing water fountains along a walking trail or the Safety department adding a traffic light at an intersection
  - Review recommendations by department heads such as requests for new computers to use in their record keeping

- Give permission for people build houses, churches, stores, or other buildings in keeping with a town's codes and ordinances
6. Tell students that the mayor and city council deal with many issues. Sometimes citizens attend the city council meeting to make requests and to try to persuade the council to vote a certain way on an issue.
  7. If you invite a guest speaker, ask that person to address the brainstorm list and add to it or correct any misunderstandings on the list. Ask the guest speaker to identify the duties of the mayor and city council members in the students' town.
  8. Students participate in a mock city council meeting. Have students draw a role from the handout titled, "Roles for the Mock City Council Meeting." (Note: Drawing for roles is a fair way to distribute them. However, you know your students, so you might feel that you need to assign the roles.) The issue for discussion at the city council meeting is: Should the town add more recyclable items to the newspapers and cans they currently accept at the drop-off site? The pretend town is Shady Hollow.
  9. Have students meet in groups to discuss how they will participate in the meeting. The mayor and city council members meet in one group. The citizens who are for adding items to the recycling site meet together, and the citizens who do not want the city to recycle more items, meet in another group.
  10. In their groups, students read the scenario for the meeting titled "Issue before the Council." Students use the information in the scenario and instructions on their role cards to make their plans.
  11. Arrange the classroom by placing desks for the mayor and city council members in a line in front of the classroom so that they are facing the "citizens." Create a wide aisle between the remaining seats so that the "pro citizens" can sit together on one side of the aisle, and the "against citizens" can sit together on the other side of the aisle. Place a podium or a representation of a podium at the head of the aisle. Instruct the citizen students that when it is their turn to speak, they come to podium one at a time, state their names, and give their opinions to the council. (**Note:** There are 22 roles. If you have fewer students, you might decrease the number of city council members. There are also guest citizens who present supplemental points rather than main points. These roles could be combined with those presenting main points, or they could be eliminated.)
  12. If you engage a guest, ask him/her to instruct the students in council meeting proceedings. The guest can interrupt the meeting at anytime to re-orient or redirect the students in their proceedings.
  13. After all of the citizens have spoken, the "mayor and city council members" discuss the issue and vote.
  14. The mayor thanks the council members and the citizens and declares the meeting adjourned.
  15. Once they are students again, discuss the simulation and what they learned. If a guest is in attendance, include his/her comments and clarification.

**Evaluation:** Students write paragraph titled "The Mayor and City Council: Their Duties and the Issues they Address."