

VIII. Power, Power: Who's Got the Power in Our Town?

8 Activity

WHAT?

Students will identify and describe the distribution of power and responsibility among the various figures in local government. This lesson is based on the "Claim Your Power" activity in the Law in a Changing Society materials.

WHY?

- To engage in limited role playing activity
- To describe the structure and functions of government at municipal, county, and state levels.
- To analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions
- To use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages/disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution
- To use a decision-making process to identify a situation that requires a decision, gather information, identify options, predict consequences, and take action to implement a decision

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills addressed in this lesson:

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 7: Interpret Social Studies Data
- Objective 8: Critical-Thinking Skills



HOW?

Materials needed:

- Information about local government, from the Texas history text, from lecture notes (which you can prepare from the background information for teachers, material printed by the League of Women Voters, or other sources)
- If you wish, copies of the outline page for students to use in taking notes
- Name plates, and “claim” - “do not claim” signs for each of the groups
- Score-keeping materials, if you wish

Suggested Teaching Time: 1 to 2 class periods

Suggested Procedures:

1. Provide students with information about the distribution of power, duties, and responsibilities of various figures in town government. This can be done through students reading and taking notes from a textbook section on the topic, or through students taking notes from your lecture, or a combination of these two ways to impart information. You may wish to focus on your particular town and its unique government, or may prefer a more general overview.
2. Divide the class into groups to represent key town figures and groups:
 - mayor
 - city council (or city commission, or board of aldermen)
 - city manager
 - town departments and employees
 - voters
3. Have each group review its powers, duties, and responsibilities using their collective notes. For students who have only sketchy notes, have other group members help fill in missing details. The object here is for every member of the group to have excellent notes to use to study the material for homework, and in the short term, to use to answer questions in the upcoming class review activity. You will want to circulate among the groups to clarify factual misunderstandings that arise as students try to make sense of their notes, and to give pointers about notetaking and note updating. If your class lacks much notetaking experience, you may wish to use the rough outline below and have students write in their own facts as they read or listen.
4. Give each group a name plate (mayor, city council, etc.) and two hand-held signs reading “claim” and “do not claim.”
5. Then read aloud, one by one, the responsibilities, characteristics, and powers listed below. Have each small group consult with one another (for no more than a minute, and probably only 10 or 20 seconds) and decide if the description you have read applies to them or not.
6. Then ask the correct group to raise their signs, indicating whether they are described in the sentence you have just read. Each group member should be able to point to the place in his or her notes that verifies the group’s vote.
7. Clarify concepts, as needed.
8. Debrief the activity by comparing the scores of the various groups and determining if those scores really represent the relative power held by that person or group in your town.

Follow-Up Possibilities: You may wish to include items from the game that students found difficult, in your warm-ups for the next several days.

Evaluation: This activity is an excellent review activity before a test. You may wish to grade students’ notes, in addition to their participation.