

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## The Mayor of Our Town

Every town and city in Texas has a slightly different way of doing just about everything, including running the town government. This description is a one-size-fits-all general, all-purpose description of a mayor. It will probably fit your town fairly well, but you will want to explore some of the specific duties of *your* mayor that make your town special and different.

The mayor is the political head of your town and he or she is supposed to keep the town moving in a positive direction.

- Let's stop here and have you explain in your own words what it means to keep a town moving in a positive direction. (It does NOT mean traveling to the north or south!)

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- How can you tell if a town is moving ahead or is bogged down with problems?

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The mayor performs this responsibility in a number of different ways:

### LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES: Making Laws for Our Town

- The mayor is a member of the city council and gets to vote on issues, just like all the other city councilmembers do.
  - The mayor **presides** over the city council, city commission, or board of aldermen meetings. This means that he or she runs council meetings and has the power to decide which councilmembers get to talk and share their ideas. The mayor also has the power to call on other councilmembers who want to make a **motion**, or suggest an idea to be voted on.
- Why would this power to call on people to speak in a meeting be important?

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4. Do you think your mayor only calls on people who agree with his or her viewpoint? Explain your thinking.

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- c. The mayor also rules on questions of **procedure**, or the rules about how things get done in the meeting. The mayor’s ruling must be accepted unless a **majority** of the city councilmembers challenge it, or think that it is unfair. This power allows a mayor to decide how to run council meetings.

For example, the mayor can decide to have a vote by a show of hands or a roll call vote. Many mayors prefer that councilmembers raise their hands because it is faster to count. In a close vote, he or she may call for a roll call vote. Or the mayor may ask for a roll call vote on a controversial issue if the mayor wants the public to know how each councilmember voted.

5. Why do you think your mayor might want to know how a vote will turn out before the actual voting in a council meeting? If you were mayor, what could you do to make the vote turn out the way you want it to?

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- d. In some Texas cities, the mayor has the power to veto **ordinances** and other things voted on by the city council. This **veto** power allows the mayor to single-handedly undo an ordinance, or local law, that most members of the city council thinks is needed.

6. What would be good about giving one person—the mayor—the power to stop a local law from being put into effect?

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7. Name one problem that could come up in a city in which the mayor has veto power.

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**APPOINTIVE POWERS: Choosing People to Help Lead Our Town**

- e. In mayor-council cities in Texas, the mayor has the authority to appoint **department heads** and **advisory board members**.

Each city sets up its departments a little differently. The bigger the city, the larger and more specialized the departments will be. But many cities have, for example, an electric department and a police department. In cities with a mayor-council government, the mayor chooses the person who will be the director of the electric department and the chief of police.

Advisory boards are groups of townspeople who give advice to the city about how to do something, such as keep water clean or reduce crime in the city. They are citizens, either “ordinary citizens” or citizen experts in the advisory board’s area.

- 8. Why would some people think it was a bad idea for the mayor alone to have this power to appoint city leaders?

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- 9. Why would other people think it would be good to have this power held by the mayor alone?

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**SIGNATORY POWERS: The Power to Sign Official Paperwork**

- f. Before anything becomes official in city government, there are always papers, or **documents**, to be written up, read over, and signed by the mayor.

For example, the mayor has to sign all city **bonds**. A bond is a promise to pay back money that a city borrows. A city cannot sell bonds unless the mayor signs all the necessary paperwork.

The mayor also has the power to sign other **contracts**, or agreements between the city and a company or person.

Signing **proclamations**, or special papers announcing events (City Litter Clean Up Day), or congratulating people for personal achievements (City Clerk Appreciation Day).

**CEREMONIAL DUTIES: Going to Ceremonies as the City’s Official Host**

- g. Almost every day, mayors all over Texas are cutting ribbons as new businesses open, digging up a bit of dirt at ground-breaking ceremonies when a new building is planned, or going to fairs, parades, and other community gatherings.

Mayors are the officials who often welcome visitors who come to town for meetings and conventions. Sometimes you see mayors giving a special welcome to someone when they hand out the “key to the city.”



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10. Why would the citizens want their mayor to go to all these celebrations and events?

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11. Why would the mayor want to go to many of these events?

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## WANTED: A MAYOR FOR OUR TOWN

Construct a campaign poster or flier for a fictional Mayor that lists:

1. his or her qualifications for mayor,
2. his or her job responsibilities, and
3. the benefits of the job.

You will be graded on:

1. Completeness (Did you include all requested items?)
2. Factual correctness (Do you have your facts straight?)
3. Correct use of the English language (Do you express yourself clearly and correctly?)
4. Effectiveness of the ad (Is the ad creative and interesting to read?)

