

XIV. Face to Face with a Town Official

14 Activity

WHAT?

Students will participate in a guest speaker presentation, job shadowing program, or a career fair where city officials explain their job responsibilities and duties.

WHY?

- To explain the changes in the types of jobs and occupations that have resulted from the urbanization of Texas
- To describe the structure and functions of government at municipal, county, and state levels
- To analyze the economic impact of the free enterprise system in local, national, and international markets
- 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:

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

Economic:

- Understand the factors that caused Texas to change from an agrarian to an urban society
- Understand the interdependence of the Texas economy with the United States and the world

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

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 8: Critical-Thinking Skills



How?

Suggestions for the best use of guest speakers with your students.

1. Do not be shy! City officials will probably jump at the chance to meet with your students. Your students will look forward to the chance to meet a real government official, some because they think they are getting out of “real” work, but most of them because they are having a rare and important chance to learn firsthand about a subject.
2. Be sure to notify your principal that you plan to invite or have already invited a guest. If you feel it would be wise, send out notices to parents in advance of the speaker’s arrival to let them know of the upcoming lesson.
3. Do not let your principal or a fellow teacher convince you that you need to have your guest address the whole school in an assembly. Your students will benefit most from one-on-one time with the official. They will get a feel for the person and the job, and will have a chance to get their individual questions answered. They will be less likely to miss the points of the talk if they are in the familiar classroom environment under your watchful eye.
4. Always prepare your guest speaker before he or she arrives. When making the appointment, tell the guest the kinds of lessons you have been conducting and then follow up your conversation with a letter listing the main concepts you have covered with your students. If there have been controversial subjects that have arisen in discussions, or if there are questions you did not feel confident about answering, let the guest know in advance. The American Bar Association offers hints for attorneys who are guest speakers. Your visitors may find this to be helpful to them, too, especially if you send it before their visit!
5. Choose the timing of the guest’s visit to come towards the end of your unit on city government. It is a waste of the guest’s time to give students the basics of city government. After they know something of the workings of their municipality, have the guest come to answer higher level questions.
6. Make students responsible for how the class goes.
 - Have each student write down three questions they have for the speaker. Collect their questions in advance of the visit, make encouraging notes to students about their questions, and then return student question sheets on the day of the speaker’s visit. By doing this, all students will have something written down that they can ask, and the questions do not have to be dominated by vocal members of the class. Also, each student will have a stake in listening to the speaker and having his or her own unique concerns addressed.
 - Have each student make a paper name plate giving his or her first name, and have students place these on their desks in a clearly visible spot. This helps your guest feel a little more in touch with the students, allows him or her to customize answers and refer specifically to points made by students, and helps nervous speakers remember that this is a group of middle school individuals, not a sea of anonymous teenagers.
 - Assign greeters to meet the speaker in the office.
 - If the class meets around lunch time, select interested students to take him or her to the cafeteria for lunch.
7. Be there in the classroom the whole time your speaker is there. Of course it is tempting to leave for a few minutes since another adult is with your class. But that other adult is not used to working with students and may well be intimidated by them. Besides, if you stay, you will be able to take notes and follow up on key points made by the speaker.
8. Encourage speakers to bring visual aids, pamphlets, business cards, sample documents (affidavits, voter registration cards, ordinances, and the like). Discourage speakers from showing films. This cuts into your guest speaker’s time interacting with your students, which is the whole point of having the speaker come. Ask the speaker to solicit questions and input from students, and role play if possible.
9. Encourage students to write substantive thank-you notes to the speaker.

Follow-Up Possibilities: Students may be able to participate in a job shadowing or career connection program during the summer. These opportunities will allow students to get real experiences with city government and the jobs available.

Evaluation: Written thank-you notes to the speaker.