

Get Involved!

Note that many lessons have fostered discussion amongst the teachers who have used them. You can join these discussions, and gain access to many additional features, just by signing up for an ePortfolio!

This lesson is most appropriate for High School classrooms.

Theme: What roles do citizens play in local government

MCF Benchmark: Explain why people may agree on democratic values in the abstract but disagree when they are applied to specific situations.

Other benchmarks this lesson targets include:

- Determine, evaluate, and use resources that are most appropriate and readily available for investigating a particular question or topic.
- Examples include knowledgeable people, field trips, prefaces, appendices, icons/headings, hypertext, menus and addresses, Internet and electronic mail, CD-ROM/laser disks, microfiche, and library and interlibrary catalogue databases.
- Write fluently for multiple purposes to produce compositions, such as stories, poetry, personal narratives, editorials, research reports, persuasive essays, resumes, and memos.
- Use the ideas in the Declaration of Independence to evaluate the conduct of citizens, political behavior, and the practices of government.

Materials needed:

Material will depend on the instructor's accessibility to technology.

Methodological procedure:

Notes to Instructor:

- Prerequisite lessons are:
 - What are the kinds of local governments in Michigan?
 - What are the structures of local governments - who has the executive, legislative, and judicial responsibilities?
- Utilizing a computer lab will work best for this lesson; however, if a lab is not available, all that is essential is one computer per group.
- This lesson can also be adapted for use in a classroom setting without computers. The teacher may choose to gather materials for research ahead of time, or assign the research to students as homework.

DAY 1

1. Begin by describing the purpose and procedures of the lesson to the class; example - "We are going to be learning about ways that ordinary citizens, including yourselves, can become involved in and make a difference in local government. We are going to do research to find this information, and the end result will be an informative flyer that you will produce in your groups. We will be spending some time in the computer lab working on this."
2. Next, students will need to review some key information about their local government by answering the questions below. This information can be easily given to students by drawing a chart on the board and discussing the answers. The instructor will want the students to record this information somewhere. (Note: answers will vary depending on where you live. This information can easily be found by looking at your city's website or contacting your city hall.)

Questions

- Under which form of local government do you reside? (city, village, township, etc.)
 - What system of government does your form of local government possess? (strong/weak mayor, council, council and manager, etc.)
 - How often does your form of local government meet?
 - Where and when does your form of local government meet?
3. After students have completed the chart, brainstorm on the whiteboard or chalkboard ways that an ordinary citizen can become involved in government at the local level. Give students approximately 5 minutes to write down their answers quietly, and then make a list on the board as a whole class. Instruct students to add ones from the board that they didn't have on their list. Student answers will vary, but be sure that students have mentioned all of the following:
 - volunteer to run for an elected office: mayor, city council member, city clerk, treasurer
 - work for your local form of government in a paid or volunteer position
 - serve on boards: zoning, planning
 - register to vote and vote
 - be informed (read newspapers, etc.)
 - attend city council meetings
 - call local officials for assistance with problems or to give opinions/concerns
 - meet with local government officials
 - join a local issue-oriented community group
 - volunteer to help a candidate with his/her campaign
 - write letters to the editor of local newspapers concerning local issues
 - petition
 - volunteer services: firefighter, schools, shelters, etc.

When the list is complete, the instructor may want to hold a brief discussion/conversation with students and ask them to take a look at the list and think about the things they already do that involves them in local government. Next, ask them why it's important that citizens participate in local government. Point out that citizens are those who form their entities of

local government and have control over it. What happens if the citizens don't participate? These focus questions should help students see the importance in not only knowing how to be involved, but actually becoming involved in their local government.

4. Organize students into groups of 3-4. Within each group, students need to divide up the ways to get involved in local government (from the list on the board). Each student needs to pick at least two (more with smaller groups). Each student will be responsible for researching their ways to become involved in local government. If there is time remaining in class, students can begin this assignment using Internet resources or local phone books. Stress to students that the importance of this lesson is to find out how to become active in local government. The instructor may decide to tell them other resources for finding this information include current local newspapers, local official and board members, or their parents. Whatever is unfinished at the end of class should be considered homework.

DAY 2

Again, the ideal setting is a computer lab; access to Microsoft Publisher or Inspiration software is a plus.

1. Today students will put their information together in the form of a flyer. Each group will create one flyer. Each group member is responsible for creating one piece for each subject they researched. One must be a news story, which is factual and informative, but they can choose whether the other is an editorial or advertisement. They can have a little fun and be creative with their second piece, but remind them that it still needs to be factual and informative. Students should keep in mind that the finished product should look professional, with articles written in columns and good uses of color, graphics, and borders while.
 - o each flyer needs a clear title (example: How to Participate in Royal Oak's Local Government) and date
 - o each flyer should only cover one side of an 8 x 11 sheet of paper
2. Because they are limited to one page, groups may want to choose the best pieces to include, however each group member must have at least one of their articles in the final product. As students finish with their work and decide what to include, one or more group members should begin inputting their work into Microsoft Publisher or other software while the others finish.
3. Once the news items are typed into the computer, students should begin the final proofing of their flyer. Members of each group need to choose a specific role - here is what's needed:
 - o Copy Editor (2 students): edits articles and advertisements as they are written and screens the final version for any typographical errors.
 - o Graphics Editor (1-2 students): responsible for the page layout and any borders or graphics used in the flyer.
4. Students now have all of the information needed to complete this lesson. It is up to the teacher when to make the flyer due; a suggestion would be to give them a few more days to work on it on their own time. To provide students with feedback, the instructor may want to collect a rough draft of the flyer to make sure students are on the right track and have the correct information. On the due date, complete Day 3 of this lesson.

DAY 3

A computer lab is not necessary for the wrap up of this lesson.

1. Instruct students to hang on to their finished flyers and choose one member from each group as a spokesperson.
2. Go around the room and have the spokesperson hold up the finished flyer and explain what their group has done with the topics. The instructor may ask the students to read one or more articles and explain any advertisements or graphics. Once this is finished, collect the flyers.
3. Have students complete a reflective writing assignment by answering these questions thoughtfully: What did you find out about how to become active in local government no matter where you live? Where is this information located? What were your frustrations in this process? What were the easy parts to this assignment?
The instructor may wish to briefly discuss their answers before collecting them.
4. If there is time remaining in Day 3, the teacher may want to hold a discussion with students on the importance of citizen involvement at the local government level. The following focus questions may be raised by the facilitator:
 - A. What can you do to be an informed, responsible citizen?
 - B. Why is it important to be involved in local government?
 - C. Describe why your input at the local government level is important.
 - D. Where do you feel our local form of government needs more citizen involvement?
 - E. What are you most likely to do to become involved in local government?
 - F. What is the affect local government has on your life?
 - G. How can you affect local government?

Author's notes:

See top of Procedures for Notes to Instructor

Assessment strategies:

The assessment of this lesson is two-fold. The formal assessment will be on the finished product of the flyer. The second assessment is informal; read through the reflective writing pieces and check for understanding.

Enrichment suggestions:

- Instead of focusing on city/village government, the lesson could easily incorporate county or township government as well, or a combination of the three.
- Instead of using the idea of a flyer, the instructor may opt to give students the choice of creating a newspaper or pamphlet on the subject and/or vary the length requirement.
- Students may wish to distribute their newspapers or pamphlets to local citizens. Perhaps combine the best ideas from all flyers into one and distributed locally. Another possibility would be to have the school or local newspaper print the flyer.
- Students may wish to participate in an area of local government that they are interested in. This would be either an excellent extra credit opportunity or extension of the lesson.

- Perhaps there was a frustration that was evident in your city; the website wasn't helpful, or it was particularly difficult to find necessary information. Take these concerns to the correct places and try to correct them. If this is the case, it will be even more important to let your city's citizens know the important information the students discovered.

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