

ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL LOCAL GOVERNMENT CURRICULA

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Title: What do we do with our doo-doo?

Theme: Understanding the roles of those who serve in local township government

GLCE:

- 2-C2.0.1** Explain how local governments balance individual rights with the common good to solve local community problems.
- 2-C3.0.1** Give examples of how local governments make, enforce, and interpret laws (ordinances) in the local community.
- 2-C3.0.2** Use examples to describe how local government affects the lives of its citizens.
- 2-C5.0.1** Identify ways citizens participate in community decisions.

Materials: Attachments 1-7
pens
pencils
markers
post-its or poster paper

Advanced preparation by the teacher: Contact your local township office using the websites listed below. Ask for any materials, including videos they might have to show your students. Another valuable resource would be to tape your local board in action and bring it into school to show the students. Another option would be to schedule a time for a local township officer to come to your classroom to give an interview or to speak about what it is that they do.

Methodological procedures:

This lesson will take approximately 4 class periods.

*Optional: Teachers may want to preview the following vocabulary with their students: **State, County, City, Village, Township, Treasurer, Supervisor, Clerk, Trustee, Sewer, Special Assessment, Development, Resident, Constituent, Contractor, Feasible, Levy, Property (in reference to land ownership), Petition***

Day #1: Information sharing day (Approx. lesson time: 20 minutes.) (Please note that the following site will provide much of the factual information that the teacher and students will need for this lesson. The site is: <http://www.michigantownships.org/>.) Once on the site, clicking on “citizen information” will pull up much factual information.

During the first day an explanation and discussion around the 3 branches of government should begin the lesson. Students should understand that some individuals may live in a city, while some might live in a township, and yet all may attend the same schools. If possible, find a map that has a break down of the different township lines so that students can visually see the differences. (a map is also available on this site). Ask questions of students to check levels of understanding.

Day #2: Research day. (Approximate time: one hour if using computer lab with students; much shorter if teacher does research ahead of time.) Block out a time to use the computer lab. Students should visit their local township website using <http://www.infomi.com/>, to write

down what information they find out about their township and the offices within the township, using handout #2. Students should also research how many trustees they have based on the populations of their township. Have them discover at least one important issue that is headlined on the website. Have them list “I wonder” questions that they might ask a township resident or a member of the board. After the students have had adequate time to complete their research session, hold a classroom discussion based on their findings. List any questions the kids might have under a KWL chart, and explore their “I wonder” statements.

(Note: It is NOT imperative that students do this research on their own in the computer lab. The teacher can easily conduct the research ahead of time and use the information through a class discussion and note sharing time.)

Day #3: “What do we do with our doo-doo?” Explain to the students that in order to better understand what township officials do, they will take part in a simulation or activity that will enable them to experience an issue that is important in township government which is providing for a community’s basic needs. Introduce the scenario by asking them what they think happens to their waste when they use the toilet and flush it (this will, hopefully, get everyone’s attention). If you want to get really creative, search google for a “doo-doo cookie” recipe and make the kids cookies as an intro to their assignment. Explain to the class that their scenario is this:

The entire class has found beautiful “Stinky Lake” within the township limits, and they have all decided to build homes there. The homes are different based on income structure, but every home is experiencing the same issue: when a resident goes to flush the toilet, their waste, or “doo-doo”, will not go down as there is no where for it to go. The residents do not have anywhere to house their “doo-doo” and it is starting to smell (gross, but students really go for this stuff). Therefore, they must organize as residents and bring their concerns to their government, which in this case, is general law township government. The government officials must decide, along with the residents, how to fix this problem. They will present the idea of a sewer project to serve the needs of the residents in their development, knowing that it will cost a reasonable amount of money for the lake-dwelling residents to install the sewer system.

Divide the class into two groups: the Township board (1 Supervisor, 1 Treasurer, 1 Clerk, and 2 Trustees) and the Township Residents. Print out and distribute the scenario cards (handout #3) to the “Township Board Members” and to the “Residents.” The residents’ cards will be different, and this is designed to spark debate between the residents, so that students will be able to see why some people may feel one way with regard to an issue, and others may feel another way. Give students 5 minutes or so to read their scenario cards and to answer any questions they might have regarding the project. Students should write a plan for day 4 (handout #4), which should include how they feel about the issue and students may want to do additional research on their position for homework, using the web or interviewing their parents and/or neighbors in their area. If time allows, give students the opportunity to break into their groups and begin to discuss their issue. ***Remind students that the objective is for them to gain an understanding of a common township issue and how that issue impacts the township officials’ jobs.***

Day #4: Role-play day (see “Author’s Notes for a reasoning on the role-play structure): Break students into their groups and have them discuss and plan their arguments (20-25 minutes). They should group themselves according to their opinions based on the information provided on their scenario cards. Provide access for students to review the power point presentation from day one, if they choose to do so. After their time is up, have them move into the “board meeting” (move chairs and desks around to simulate a board meeting atmosphere). Each elected official must sit at the table with an identification nametag in front of them. Have each of the residents

that have come, if they so choose, voice their opinions. The “meeting” should last about 20 minutes. The teacher should facilitate as necessary. At the end of the meeting, a member of the board should make a motion to accept the petition from the public and move forward with the project at a cost of \$10,000 per household. A board member must second the motion; allow time for discussion, then vote. The board members agree or oppose with a “yay” or “nay,” and the motion must pass with a majority vote. Those that live on the lake will need to pay the township \$10,000 to be hooked up to the sewer and receive those services. There is no option—all Stinky Lake residents must pay the same amount. **The proposal is designed, in this simulation, to be passed by the majority.**

Day #5: Money Collection day and Debrief/Assessment. The Supervisor should determine the “Special Assessment District” by announcing to the class that: “after looking at a township map and determining the parameters of the Sewer District, these homes will be part of the project” (all homes on Stinky Lake should be included.) The Clerk should prepare notices (hand-out #5) for all residents in the Stinky Lake vicinity, informing them that they must pay \$10,000 to the township in order to receive the services of the Stinky Lake Sewer. While the Clerk passes out the notices, the Treasurer should be given time to “set-up” office in order to collect the money. Stress to the students that those living outside Stinky Lake will not have to pay any additional fees for the residents on the lake to receive this sewer. This will be a Special Assessment, which will go into a special bank account that the Treasurer will manage and disperse funds to the contractors accordingly. Have students line up, as if going to pay their bills to the Township, and pretend to pay their debt, which will mark the end of the unit study.

Debrief students by posing the following questions:

- What did you think about the process of proposing a sewer to the township board?
- Do you think the constituents’ concerns were adequately heard?
- How do you think the board could have better understood and addressed the issue brought to the table?
- Do you think the system could be made better by changing the structure of the process? What kinds of changes would you suggest?
- Was everyone happy with the final decision? Why or why not? Do you think it is possible and/or necessary for everyone in this situation to be happy with the end result?

After the debrief discussion, see “assessment strategies” for the description of the writing assignment.

Author’s notes:

- This lesson is suited to follow elementary lessons “Who’s Who in Local Government” and “Service With a Smile.” See the Civic Institute home page under “Elementary Lessons” for these lesson guides.
- For the role-play session (day 4), the structure is designed by research of other similar township situations. A motion for a township board to hear a petition must have a second by other board members before constituents can proceed. If the proposal is backed with 51% of the signatures of the concerned constituents (people living at Stinky Lake, which would ultimately be affected by the installation of the sewer), the board will make a motion to do a feasibility study. The board will then hire an engineering firm to complete this research and make a suggestion as to the possibility of the project. After this report is made and the concerns of the public have been heard, the board will make a decision to go forward with the project or not. If they go forward with the project, the residents that

are affected by the project, as determined by the supervisor, will be required to pay for the sewer. This cannot come from general township funds, or tax-payers dollars, because it does not affect all township residents. A general estimate, in this scenario, for the sewer to be installed, is \$10,000.00. I chose this number because it is a fair representation of an actual cost; residents of the concerning areas would have to pay the township a dollar amount similar to this number. This would be considered a “Special Assessment,” which would be collected and deposited into a special account used to pay for the services needed to construct the sewer. The simulation is set up so that the motion will pass. This will enable students to see what happens when a project of this nature takes place (as it often does in areas with new development) and so they would be able to experience more thoroughly the roles of the treasurer and the clerk, which would otherwise be relatively mundane in this exercise.

Assessment strategies:

To assess students’ comprehension of the lesson, give them the assignment of writing a newspaper editorial analyzing the roles of the township officials and the process of hearing a petition by the public. Propose the following questions (adapt questions to fit your classroom discussion):

- Analyze the positions of the township officials. Did they do their jobs? Should they have done more research to prepare themselves to vote on installing the sewer system, or was their research adequate? Were the residents happy with the results of the vote and why (or why not)? Use examples from the simulation and from your research to support your opinion. (See **handout #7—writing prompt**)

Enrichment suggestions:

- A math extension could be created from this unit by showing how townships are responsible for completing census reports and distributing and interpreting that data. More information can be found at <http://www.michigantownships.org/>.
- A Science extension could be created by having students examine the treatment of waste and how it affects our current water system.

Available downloads:

Suggested web sites:

<http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/michloc.html>

<http://www.michigantownships.org/>

<http://www.infomi.com/>