

Your Government: You Make The Decisions

A. WHAT STUDENTS WILL LEARN IN UNIT SIX

Students will develop a vision for a community, using cooperative learning techniques and involving community resource persons. Students will be able to:

- Prepare a class-developed mission statement for their own community.
- Accumulate and analyze information about a key element (one for each of the five groups in the class) of the operation of local government.
- Work cooperatively to combine their five group plans to create one comprehensive and presentable plan.
- Present the class plan to resource persons used in the plan's preparation, as well as other community groups.

B. ADDITIONAL STUDENT ACTIVITIES

This culminating unit has students, in committees, design a new community. The committees deal with the following: cultural heritage, government structure, the providing of city services, land use planning and financing the community. Each committee should use outside resource people from the community.

1. As a class, brainstorm the aspects of your city which make your community unique and special. Are there events, traditions, people and places which differentiate your community from those surrounding it? Invite senior citizens to share their perspective and help with the brainstorming.
2. Have students interview parents, grandparents and residents of their neighborhoods to discover what they consider most important to include in the planning of a "new" city. Remind them to include people of both genders and various ages and occupations.
3. Have students work in groups and choose one of the following topics: cultural heritage, government structure, the providing of city/county services, local government players, land use planning and financing the community. Have students use the charts on pages 20, 22, 24 and 26 of the student guide, the telephone book, etc., as references. They should identify the most appropriate resource people to meet with their group to help them learn more about the issues concerning their topics. Don't forget to include service clubs and religious organizations as possible resource persons.

4. Students can practice their letter writing skills by composing a letter of invitation to an elected or appointed official or staff member, or a community member. Have them be sure to include the time, date, address (and map) and contact information, a brief explanation of the group or class project and a suggestion for topics to be addressed by the guest.
5. Reminding students of the importance of thank you notes, have each student in the class write a letter of appreciation to community resource people who have visited the class.

C. UNIT SIX DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following discussion questions could help students prepare to design their new community. Students' answers will vary with the community.

Question 1. What pertinent issues are currently being addressed by your local governments? Which do you think most impact you and your family? Which do you think most impact the entire community?

Question 2. Is public safety a concern for your community? Which specific issues can you identify and how do these issues impact your local government service? Has your community introduced a neighborhood watch or safe streets program? What other crime prevention programs are being initiated?

Question 3. What provisions for mass transit are currently being planned or implemented? What new public works projects are in progress? Which geographical areas in your community have been protected from development? Why?

Question 4. Has your area had a major emergency? What local government agencies would provide services in the event of an emergency?

Question 5. Is there any new development in your community? Are there any new businesses, or any that have left your area? Why? Which local government agencies have responsibility for regulating new buildings? Which regulate business?

Question 6. What are the major environmental or health concerns in your community? Does your community have ordinances relating to environmental or health, i.e. smoking ordinances? What facilities are available for residents to exercise?

D. INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Unit VI offers the chance for all subject areas to be integrated into the culminating showcase activity:

- English or language arts classes could work on the group reports which will be presented in this culminating activity. The creation of these reports could be credit assignments for the local government class as well as for the English class.
- math and computer classes could help with zoning, budget planning and projections, charts and graphs for revenue and expenses.
- science classes could explore environmental and health concerns for the community.
- physical education classes could work with local parks and recreation staff, focusing on facilities and activities available for youths.
- art classes could explore architectural styles and make recommendations for monuments and murals. They could also develop a plan to address graffiti problems in the community.

- Psychology and sociology classes could identify health and human services available for the poor and homeless.

E. CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING: ASSESSING WHAT YOUR STUDENTS HAVE LEARNED

Research is validating what good teachers have known instinctively: Good assessment is an integral part of good instruction. It is on-going and culminates in having students demonstrate in real-life situations their understanding of learning outcomes that have been clearly stated and shared during the learning process.

Authentic assessment and performance assessment are terms that describe methods of having students demonstrate what they have learned by requiring them to solve problems, perform tasks or create products under simulated “real-life” situations. An assessment portfolio is a collection of student work that can serve as the basis for evaluating work in progress as well as work over time.

Unit VI of the student guide provides students a multitude of opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned about local government. The following chart offers many examples of portfolio assessments for local government.

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Sample Portfolio Tasks: Local Government

Research a local government person in your community

- Report
- Journal
- A play (group investigation)
- Letters (to and from)
- Dramatic portrayal

Look at a local government event in your community

- Time capsule
- Dramatic enactment
- Eyewitness report

Interpret local government data

- Graphs, maps, time-lines — annotated by student
- Venn diagrams (community figures or events)

Link past to present

- Dialogue/interview with long-time resident
- Comparative map studies

Analyze cause and effect

- Venn diagrams, graphs, time-lines (annotated)
- Essays using speculation, evaluation, problem solution, overlay maps

Use multiple perspectives - multi-cultural perspectives

- “You are there” scripts (audio/ video/ written)
- Local newspaper written from different perspectives
- Community “Key Player” diary (historical empathy)
- Monologues - written
- Cartooning

Defend a position

- Newspaper editorial — letters to editor
- Debates — written pros/cons with reflections of debate process
- Campaign speech

Source: Adapted from the California Department of Education History-Social Science Portfolio Committee, Darrell Myers, Chair; and Kristin Palmquist, Consultant.

Education and Community Resources

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

P*icture Yourself In Local Government* is a valuable tool to teach students how local government can make a difference in their lives and how they can make a difference in their communities. The student guide has been designed to be most effective when enhanced with education and community resources.

As schools strive to meet their restructuring and reform agendas, city and county elected officials and staff can prove to be a most valuable resource. Local government is rich with opportunities to bring the community into the classroom as well as take students into the community. In addition, partnerships between schools and local government illustrate the adage: "It takes an entire community to educate a child."

Several of the activities in the student guide provide opportunities for parents or other members of the government, business, legal or education communities to work with students. Many also offer an ideal forum for youth community service and youth service learning. Community members can help students learn by: providing information about careers; serving as role models; offering insight on the services, processes and issues of local government; role-playing as decision-makers; or giving feedback to students as they simulate city council and county supervisor meetings. Activities are also designed to utilize members of city or county governments as resource people

who assist in the preparation of the reports in each unit or who serve as debriefing "experts" at the conclusion of the units.

Local "key players," representing various segments of the community, such as labor unions, employee and professional associations, school boards, business, neighborhood associations and service clubs, can bring many pertinent local government issues to life. Teachers can help visitors focus on issues that will most benefit and interest students!

Local government officials can also address issues introduced in the student guide, as well as illustrate some of the concepts with real-life examples. School site administrators and support staff can also be used as resources particularly when dealing with activities involving school districts, school financing and debriefing various state initiatives and propositions.

Community resource people, in conjunction with the student guide, primary source documents and other resources, can provide a dynamic atmosphere that enhances student learning. The use of active, responsible adults as resources can help students recognize their obligation to be good citizens and convey the empowering message: "*At the local level, individual voices, votes and actions can make a difference!*"

Following is a list of additional resources that may be useful in your quest to enrich your history-social science curriculum.