



The State House/Civics

I. SYNOPSIS

Midge Guerrera explains that the word democracy comes from the Greek word *demos*, meaning "people." Democracy means government by the people. But that doesn't mean all the people. At one time in New Jersey history if you didn't own property, or if you were a woman, or if you were an African American, or if you weren't twenty-one years of age, you couldn't vote. Furthermore, not everyone votes on every issue. We elect people to vote for us in Trenton, which is what we mean by representative government.

Karen Polling, our guide, takes the students into the General Assembly gallery, and explains that the state is divided into legislative districts, in which the voters elect one state senator and two members of the General Assembly from each district. Together these representatives constitute the two houses of the legislature. She takes the students to the Senate floor, where she explains that to become a law a bill must pass both houses of the legislature. The students debate and vote on a bill to ban homework.

After a bill passes both houses of the legislature, it must be either signed or vetoed by the governor. In the governor's outer office, Midge Guerrera explains that today the governor is elected directly by the voters, but the first governors of the state of New Jersey were elected by the legislature. A student, acting as governor, signs the "Homework Bill" into law.

II. KEY WORDS

Democracy - government by the people

Representative government - electing representatives to vote on your behalf on specific issues

Legislator - a lawmaker, from the Latin word *legis*, meaning "law"

Legislative district - a geographical division represented by one senator and two members of the *General Assembly*

Executive - the person responsible for carrying out the laws

Veto - to prevent a bill that has passed both houses of the legislature from becoming a law

III. SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

A. DEMOCRACY

1. Objective

Students will interpret a primary historical document.

2. After viewing the program

Download, reproduce and distribute the excerpts pertaining to voting qualifications from the 1776, 1844, and 1947 New Jersey state constitutions. Explain that just as the national government in Washington has a constitution that created and regulates the federal government, the state of New Jersey also has a constitution. In fact, New Jersey has had three constitutions -- in 1776, 1844, and 1947 -- each of which had different requirements for voting.

Either ask the students to read the passages from the state constitutions to themselves or read them aloud as the students follow the text. Then discuss which groups of people were excluded from voting in each of these state constitutions? Which of these constitutions was the most democratic? Why? Which was the least democratic? Why? You should note that today, the age requirement for voting is 18. You might ask the class if the age requirement should be lower or higher or the same?

B. REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

1. Objective

Students will interpret a map to determine specific information about legislative districts.

2. After viewing the program

Download, reproduce and distribute the map of legislative districts. Ask the students to determine how many legislative districts there are in New Jersey. Then ask the students individually to determine in which legislative district they reside. Finally, the teacher should ask the students why the districts are of different sizes and whether that is fair. Additionally, the teacher might ask why the districts are of different shapes and whether that is fair.

C. LEGISLATING

1. Objective

Students will simulate how laws are made in a representative government.

2. After viewing the program

Divide the class into three groups, representing three legislative districts. Ask each group to discuss an issue, such as the "Homework Bill" mentioned in the program or any other issue of interest, real or made-up.

After the discussion, ask each group to elect one person per group to be a state senator and two students per group to be members of the *General Assembly*. Then reassemble the class and have the entire class nominate and elect a governor.

Ask the six students who have been elected senators to meet in front of the class to propose a bill based on the discussions of their legislative district. Emphasize that the elected representatives do not have to reflect the opinions of their districts. Ask them to debate and then vote on the bill.

Then ask the three students who have been elected members of the General Assembly to meet, debate, and then vote on the bill. Finally, if the bill passes both houses of the legislature, ask the student who was elected governor to either sign or veto the bill.

D. LETTERS TO YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVES

1. Objective

Students will participate in the democratic process.

2. After viewing the program

After obtaining the names and addresses of their state senators or members of the General Assembly in Activity B above (REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT) each student should write a letter to his/her representative on an issue of concern to him/her.

IV. SUGGESTED READINGS

Fay, Elaine and Charles A. Stansfield, Jr. *New Jersey: Yesterday and Today*. Morristown, N.J. and Needham, Mass.: Silver Burdett and Ginn, 1987.

Prabhuy, Barbara Williams, comp. and ed. *Spotlight on New Jersey Government*. 6th ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

Gerald M. Pomper, ed. *The Political State of New Jersey*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986.