

Town Meeting - Direct Representation

Town Meeting is a game for the whole class that encourages students to use discussion, negotiation, and political skill to make a group decision.

Corresponding Events

Business Law

Objectives

- Students will understand the political and economic situation of the simulation town.
- Students will successfully assume the roles of particular individuals from the simulation.
- Students will develop and write a detailed statement of their characters' identities, as appropriate for the simulation.
- Students will organize and stage a town meeting to consider the proposed law.
- Students will participate in the town meeting discussion, negotiations, and decision-making objectives

Materials

Handouts A, B, C

Handout A:

Town Description

Twin Cheeks is a small town on a hundred-acre lake. Most of the wage earners among the town's one hundred permanent residents work in the lumber industry (harvesting and planting trees or working in the lumber mill) or in one of the small businesses along Center Street (restaurants, clothing stores, grocers).

Another hundred residents own vacation homes along the shores of Thome Lake. Most of these people have their principle residents in the large city of Quayleville, two hours away.

A third group of fifty residents make their living from the growing summer tourist trade. These residents own or operate the seaplane rides; the motorboat, canoe, bicycle, or moped concession; the snack bars, restaurants, and novelty shops located near the public beach.

Twin Cheeks has an unemployment rate of 25% among the permanent residents. Many of these permanent residents have been supplementing their family incomes with jobs in the tourist business.

Handout B:

Proposed Law

The spring Twin Cheeks town meeting agenda includes a highly controversial item to ban motorized rentals on the lake and within the town borders during the summer vacation months. The bill was proposed by Twin Cheeks summer residents who find the snarling engines of mopeds and seaplanes disruptive to the tranquil atmosphere they sought when they bought houses there. The summer residents also find the seaplane takeoffs and landings, and the rented motorboat traffic, dangerous to bathers, people fishing, canoeists, and sailboaters.

Most year-round residents oppose the new law and favor the new rental businesses. They see tourism providing new jobs in a chronically underemployed town. The new business owners also oppose the bill, because it would undermine their trade.

Handout C:

Suggested Roles

1. **OWNER OF SEAPLANE RIDES.** He or she points out that the rides attract people to Thome Lake in the summer. These tourists buy things in stores, eat in restaurants, rent rooms in motel and cottages, and provide jobs for local families. This person is opposed to the new law.
2. **YEAR-ROUND RESIDENT.** This lady has spent her life savings to buy a house on the lake to escape the clamor of city life. The seaplane traffic - a takeoff or landing every twenty minutes - has turned her quiet retreat into a busy airport that creates not only noise but also wave that slam her fishing canoe against the dock. She favors the new law.
3. **OWNER OF TIM'S MACHINE SHOP.** Tim is a year-round resident who repairs motorboat engines for people who use powerboats on the lake. He is opposed to the new law.
4. **UNEMPLOYED LUMBERWORKER.** He has been unable to find work since the lumber industry began its slump five years ago. His eldest daughter recently found a summer job at Bertha's Moped Rental. The income really helps the family make ends meet. He is opposed to the new law.
5. **OWNER OF BATHSHEBA'S PORCH RESTAURANT.** She complains that since the mopeds started clogging up Center Street, no one wants to eat at her outdoor restaurant. She is losing business and has had to lay off three waitresses. She favors the new law.
6. **YEAR-ROUND RETIRED RESIDENT.** She complains that the seaplanes are scaring away the fish. She used to fish all summer long, which really saved on grocery bills. Now, without the fish, she and her retired husband have to spend more money on food. She favors the new law.

Activity Time:

2 days

How To Play

Day One

Students are read Handout A. The teacher leads the class in a whole-group brainstorm of what the town is like. The description of the town is fleshed-out with particular emphasis on what issues might confront its citizens.

Students are read Handout B. The discussion focuses on what arguments might be made in favor and against the law.

Students are given their own copies of Handouts A, B, and C, and each is given a particular role. Students are assigned to write a 200 word description of their role's background, needs and arguments for or against the proposed law.

Day Two

Students are assigned to groups of six or smaller for small-group town meetings, with each group having only one person from each role. Each group has appointed a discussion leader and a recorder. Other than that, each member has one vote at the time any vote is taken. The recorder will record the names of each participant and any formal actions the group takes. The recorder does not need to record discussion.

If, as the teacher monitors individual group progress, it seems that the groups will "finish" early in the period, the teacher will give the town meetings a time limit, and reassign participants to new groups attempting to group "powerful" people together and quieter people together. Again, however, each group has only one person from each role in it. Leaders and recorders are again appointed.

The last third of the period is given a two-minute warning and then recorders make their reports: What actions were taken.

The teacher leads the class in discussion of the process they have just completed. How were decisions made? What were individual feelings as their meetings progressed? Did they feel their rights or needs were respected? In particular, did the majority respect the needs of the minority; did the minority disrupt the action of the majority? What influence did a person's own experience and orientation have on his or her role in the simulation: Was each able to successfully take on the role of another?

Options

Students will either:

- Write a set of discussion guidelines for another group simulation, which would be more democratic and efficient than the process they participated in.
- Find at least one local issue, which has vested roles, and explain the issue and at least four of the vested interests.