

Tennessee Secretary of State

Civics Lesson Plans

Colonial Town Meeting Simulation

Author: Blair Lynch, Elmore Park Middle School

Grade Level: 8th

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Introduction:

Town meetings were a pivotal part of colonial government. The discussion of issues and the voting of the men of the area was the most influential form of government in the colonial era. In many ways, this is still the way most government is conducted at the local level. Students are not as impacted by Washington as they are by the decisions that take place in their local town halls. This lesson provides students with an opportunity to see how that discussion and debate takes place, determine who would and would not have been allowed to speak or take part, and to practice and develop the life skill of cordial debate.

Guiding Questions:

- Why should issues like schools, roads, and other issues be decided at the local level?
- What is the best way to openly debate an issue amongst citizens of a town?
- What are the pros and cons of a town meeting?

Learning Objectives: In the course of the lesson, students will...

- Identify who participated in local colonial government and who was excluded.
- Participate in a mock town meeting.
- Examine the role and purpose of town meetings in colonial government.

Curriculum Standards:

8.03 Explain the founding and development of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, including the significance of: Anne Hutchison, the role of theocracy, the Salem Witch Trials, and town meetings

Materials Needed:

- Copy of Town Meeting Instructions (attached)
- Copy of Voting Exercise Worksheet (attached)
- Copy of Student Roles to be passed out (attached)
- Copy of voting slips (attached)
- Copy of Student Reflection sheet (attached)
- Gavel, podium, costumes, any other teacher options to make the town meeting more realistic.

Lesson Activities:

Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson and

- Who can vote today?
- Discussion
- Do people openly talk about politics?
 - Discuss a current project being done in your community. Who pays for it? How did it get decided to be done? Etc.
 - Have any of the students ever attended a local government meeting?

Activity 2: Who Votes

- Distribute the Voting Exercise Worksheet.
- Students will look at a chart and answer questions about who voted in the colonial era.
- Discussion – make sure students know who did not have the right to participate in the town meetings or vote.

Activity 3: Town Meeting Simulation

- Students will be given a role of who they will be in order to participate in the town meeting.
- Teacher instructions are provided with the student roles.
- All students must attempt to speak during the meeting.

Activity 4: Reflection

- Students will complete their reflection sheet based upon their experience in the town meeting.

Options for Extension:

- The students can take a look at the role of religion in government in this lesson. Theocracy connected religion and government in most of the New England colonies. This connection between religion and government is very much a hot topic of debate today. There are two excerpts by Roger Williams and John Winthrop that could be used for this as well.
- Students could also engage in conversation about the gradual growth of voting rights.
- Students can be encouraged to attend a local government meeting and reflect on participation of citizens (if any), compare and contrast local meetings from colonial times and today, and types of issues discussed in the meeting.

Modifications for Other Grades:

This lesson could easily be used in a debate class or a government class about voting rights.