



Lesson 18.5 “Local Government”

Unit 18: Civics and Government Today

Lesson Objectives

- Students will construct a class KWL chart to organize their understanding of local government.
- Students will use resources to ask questions and investigate their local government.
- Students will participate in a mock town meeting according to moderator’s rules and vote on issues.

Lesson Competencies

- I can interpret and use information delivered orally or visually and respond by asking relevant questions, summarizing key points or elaborating on ideas. (ELA 7)
- I can locate, organize, and analyze information from print and non-print sources to support my development of central ideas and subtopics. (ELA 8)
- I can describe how citizens can participate in the government. (Moose SS)
- I can identify, explain, and analyze the core civic practices and foundational principles that guide governments and communities. (Moose SS)

Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire come to be the way it is?
How has New Hampshire been shaped by many voices?
How have New Hampshire’s people shaped its government?

Focus Questions

How do people act as good citizens in a democracy?
What are the people’s rights and responsibilities?
What are the responsibilities of federal, state, and local government?

Estimated Time

Between two and five 40-minute class sessions, depending on mock town meeting preparation and timing

Materials & Equipment

“KWL Chart: Local Government” template for projection
“Town vs. Cities in New Hampshire” infographic for projection
“Cities in New Hampshire” map and the “Population of New Hampshire in 2010” chart for projection if desired
Class set of “Town Quest” or “City Quest” worksheet
“Town Meeting Image Set” for projection or distribution
“Roles in Town Government” as needed
“Educator’s Notes for Town Meeting” for reference
“Rules for Town Meeting” for posting
“2021 Moderator’s Rules” as needed
“Example of Town Meeting dialogue” as needed
“2021 Warrant” and “2021 Warrant Articles” as needed
Access to Unit 18, Learn It! “[State and Local Government](#)”



Educator Introduction & Rationale

New Hampshire has a long tradition of strong local government, which gives citizens many opportunities to participate in the decisions made about their government. There are 13 cities and 221 towns in New Hampshire, and many of the municipalities set up their local governments in similar ways. Each city has a mayor and a city council or board of aldermen, elected by the voters, as well as an elected school board to make decisions for the schools. Voters can express their opinions at meetings or to their representatives, but it is the elected boards and mayor who make decisions.

In towns, the people play a more direct role in governing. New Hampshire townspeople elect local officials for town (select board or town council) and school (school board) and every year, make decisions about how they want the town and schools to be governed. At least once a year, each town is required to hold what is called a town meeting, when all of the voters in the town can come together and discuss the issues they will vote on. Most towns now divide the town meeting into a deliberative session and election day where townspeople actually cast their ballots.

Most of the elected officials are regular citizens, volunteering their time and experience for their towns. Only a few town, city, or school elected officials are paid, and most of those are not paid enough for public service to be their regular jobs. Towns and cities need lots of people to serve in these offices and to help out in the community. Please see the Educator Overview for more information. In this lesson, the goal is for students to not only understand the workings of their local government, but also to come away with a sense of responsibility for and investment in their town or city.

This lesson is the fifth lesson in Unit 18: Civics and Government Today. In Part 1, students start with a KWL chart about their local government. They investigate the infographic "Town vs. Cities in New Hampshire" and complete either a City Quest or a Town Quest to learn more specific details about their local government. They then return to the KWL chart to record their learning and see what else they want to know. In Part 2, students examine primary sources to gather knowledge about town meetings and how good citizens act in town meetings. The class then participates in a mock town meeting where students take roles and discuss real issues in New Hampshire's historic town meeting format.

Because so much of this lesson is centered around local government, many choices and examples are given to educators so that they can design activities that will be most meaningful for their students. Visiting town hall or inviting a local official to visit your classroom is an excellent way to support learning in this lesson. Making real-life connections to the abstract concepts of government is essential to guiding elementary grades students in becoming good citizens. The local historical society will also have resources for students.

There are reinforcement activities for students to consider a town moderator's neutrality or to visit town offices. Two extension activities invite students to attend a town meeting or create a town handbook. Please adapt all the material in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom. Please note, lesson vocabulary and definitions are at the end of the document. You may wish to preview these with your students.

Learning Activity

Part 1: Local Government

Activation

KWL chart. What do students know about their local government? Start a Know/Want to Know/Learned (KWL) chart to document class questions and knowledge about local government; use the provided template if you wish. The KWL chart can be a useful tool and point of reference to develop through the lesson.

If students are having trouble accessing their knowledge or figuring out what they want to know, use these questions to prompt them:

- Who runs our town/city?
- What is part of “local government”?
- Where is the town center?
- Where is the police department?
- Where is the fire department?
- What can you do at the town hall?
- Where can you get information about the town?
- What if you have a problem in town, like with your neighbor, or you disagree with something the town is doing?
- If someone new moved to town, what would they need to know? Do you know these things?

Throughout the lesson, work with the class to assess the questions they have and how they might be answered. If it is a larger-scope question, what supporting questions need to be answered first? Demonstrate scaffolding questions and knowledge so that students work on their problem-solving skills.

Student Reading

Local government. Before beginning Guided Practice, have students read pages 6-10 in Unit 18, Learn It! “[State and Local Government.](#)”

Guided Practice

Town or city? There are 13 cities in New Hampshire and 221 towns. Are you in a town or city? What does that mean for town government? Ask these questions with students and use the infographic “Town vs. Cities in New Hampshire” to investigate the difference. Additionally, use the “Cities in New Hampshire” map and the “Population of New Hampshire in 2010” chart as discussion foci. Discuss the questions together and add information and/or questions to your KWL chart.

Local government quest. Select “Town Quest” or “City Quest” worksheet as appropriate for your students. Decide for your class how students will get the information to answer the questions. Will they use the local government website, interview a local official, or ask their families? Will you do it together as a class, in small groups, or will students work independently? Give students time and resources to complete the worksheet.

Reflection

Add to the KWL chart. Ask students to return to the KWL chart to work on the “What I Learned” section. What else do they know now? What other questions do they have? Have they learned anything new,

or have they learned something that corrects what they thought they knew?

Teaching tip: Inviting a local official to help complete the KWL chart is a concrete way of ensuring students' questions are answered and giving the local official a specific way to help the class.

Part 2: Town Meeting

Independent Practice & Reflection

Mock town meeting. Project or distribute "Town Meeting Image Set" images and guide students through a Quick Connect activity. As you discuss the images, provide students with the following information:

- These are pictures from town meetings in New Hampshire from the 1940s to the 1990s.
- They are taken informally and archived at the New Hampshire Historical Society.
- They represent not only an old type of governance in New Hampshire but also current one.

Ask students, based on these images, how they think good citizens participate in a town meeting? Students might notice:

- Sitting and listening
- Speaking if desired
- Turning to look at the speaker
- Taking notes on the issues
- Voting by raising hands or ballots

Tell students that you will be having a Mock Town Meeting in your class to discuss items of importance to the town. See "Educator's Notes for Town Meeting" for what you need to consider ahead of time and suggestions for room setup. Also note examples of warrant, warrant articles, moderator's rule, and town meeting dialogue.

Review "Rules for Town Meeting" with students. Tell students that some of these rules are understood and some are clearly stated in the meeting, but even adults can have a tough time following them all of the time!

Teaching tip: Invite a town official, perhaps even the town moderator, to attend the meeting. They can moderate or participate as a citizen.

Reflection

Focus questions. Use this opportunity to focus on the larger unit questions. Choose one or put both questions at the center of a mind map, and invite the class to respond either through discussion or in writing individually. Return back to them periodically to think about how these questions apply locally, within the state, and in the nation.

- How do people act as good citizens in a democracy?
- What are the people's rights and responsibilities?

Reinforcement

1. **Town moderator's neutrality.** Use "The Importance of Neutrality" to help students investigate the essential role of Town Moderator with advice from an experienced moderator.
2. **Visit town offices.** Arrange for the class or individual students to visit the town offices. Organize ahead of time for officials to give a tour and answer student questions.

Extension

1. **Town handbook.** Think about what someone who just moved to your town or city would need to know. Create a town or city handbook that could be available publicly with helpful information about living in your local area. See the Rye Civic League's Citizen Handbook for an example.
ryecivicleague.org/?page_id=10
2. **Go to a town meeting.** Investigate when local town meetings occur and encourage students to attend with their families. Have them report to the class what was familiar and what was new to them as well as what was under discussion.



Supporting Materials

New Hampshire Historical Society Resources

1. Andover Town Meeting, circa 1980s
2. Bristol Town Meeting, 1987
3. New Hampshire Town Meeting, circa 1940s
4. Newbury Town Meeting, circa 1980s
5. Speaking at Town Meeting, circa 1980s
6. Town and City Infographic
7. Voter Check-In, circa 1980s
8. Voting at Town Meeting, 1995

Other Resources

Sources for warrant, articles and moderator rules:

- Richard King Chamberlain, Brentwood, NH, Town Moderator
- 2020 Warrant, Lincoln, NH
www.lincolnnh.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf4611/f/uploads/warrant_2020_for_website.pdf
- 2020 Annual Report Town of Brentwood and Brentwood School District
www.brentwoodnh.gov/assets/municipal/1/BRENTWOOD_2020_TR-WEB_COPY.pdf

Helpful sources about New Hampshire's town meetings:

- Civics 101: New Hampshire. *Town Meeting*.
www.civics101podcast.org/civics-101-nh-episodes/ep6
- H. Bernard Waugh, Jr., with 2015 Update by Cordell A. Johnston. *16 Things Every Citizen Should Know About Town Meeting*. New Hampshire Municipal Association. www.nhmunicipal.org/town-city-article/16-things-every-citizen-should-know-about-town-meeting
- State of New Hampshire, Revised Statutes Online. Title III Towns, Cities, Village Districts, and Unincorporated Places, Chapter 40 Government of Town Meeting
www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/iii/40/40-mrg.htm?id=8589992022

Standards

“Moose on the Loose” Content:

- ✓ Students will understand that after the revolution, the United States of America established a federal government; colonies established state governments. They will understand that the New Hampshire State Constitution established the basic structure of government for the state and created laws to protect the people and interests of the state. (3-5.T3.2)
- ✓ Students will understand that New Hampshire today is a modern, diverse state with a rich culture and thriving economy. (3-5.T8.1)

“Moose on the Loose” Skills:

- ✓ Gathering, Interpreting, and Using Evidence (3-5.S1.1)
- ✓ Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions (3-5.S2.1)
- ✓ Understanding and Participating in Government (3-5.S6.1, 3-5.S6.2)

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: The Nature and Purpose of Government (SS:CV:4:1.1, SS:CV:4:1.2)
- ✓ Civics and Governments: Structure and Function of United States and New Hampshire Government (SS:CV:4:2.2)
- ✓ Economics: Financial Institutions and the Government (SS:EC:4:4.2)
- ✓ US / NH History: Political Foundations and Development (SS:HI:4:1.2)
- ✓ US / NH History: Social/Cultural (SS:HI:4:5.4)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity
- ✓ Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ✓ Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Constructing Supporting Questions (D1.3.3-5, D1.4.3-5)
- ✓ Determining Helpful Sources (D1.5.3-5)
- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.1.3-5, D2.Civ.2.3-5, D2.Civ.4.3-5, D2.Civ.5.3-5, D2.Civ.6.3-5)
- ✓ Participation and Deliberation (D2.Civ.7.3-5, D2.Civ.8.3-5, D2.Civ.9.3-5)
- ✓ Processes, Rules, and Laws (D2.Civ.11.3-5, D2.Civ.13.3-5, D2.Civ.14.3-5)
- ✓ Taking Informed Action (D4.7.3-5)

Common Core ELA:

- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.4.1, SL.4.1a, SL.4.1b, SL.4.1c)
- ✓ Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (SL.4.6)
- ✓ Knowledge of Language (L.4.3)

Lesson Vocabulary

ballot	(noun) Something used to cast votes in an election. Ballots can either be on a piece of paper or a computer
board of aldermen	(noun) A governing body of a city or town
budget	(noun) An estimate for how much money will be spent and made in a set amount of time
citizen	(noun) A member by law of a nation or group
city council	(noun) A group of elected officials that makes laws for a city
civic engagement	(noun) Actions taken to participate in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a community
civility	(noun) Behaving or speaking in a polite manner
clerk	(noun) A person who manages and keeps records and accounts in an organization
committee	(noun) A group of people who make decisions and plans about a specific topic or issue
democracy	(noun) A government ruled by majority vote of the people
election	(noun) When people vote for a person for office or other position
government	(noun) A group of people that have the power to make and carry out laws for a community
law	(noun) A rule that regulates the actions of members of a community
local control	(noun) When decisions about government are left up to the local community, rather than the state or federal government
majority	(noun) More than half of a group
minority	(noun) Less than half of a group
moderator	(noun) A person who leads a meeting to ensure it is organized and balanced
motion	(noun) A formal proposal made in a meeting
neutral	(adjective) Describing something or someone who is not on any side of an issue
point of order	(noun) A question in a formal meeting whether the rules are being followed

public service	(noun) Something that is supplied for the benefit of the people; examples of public services are police, libraries, school, roads, courts, and military
representative	(noun) The person selected by a group of people who will communicate their views and make laws for them
school board	(noun) A group of elected representatives who make decisions about the school system in a town
select board	(noun) A group of people elected to govern a town
supervisors of the checklist	(noun) People elected to maintain the official list of voters
tax	(noun) An amount of money, added to the regular cost of an item, that goes to the government
town council	(noun) A group of people elected to govern a town
town meeting	(noun) A formal gathering of the citizens of a town to discuss and vote on town business
town meeting day	(noun) The day on which a formal gathering of the citizens of a town to discuss and vote on town business occurs; in New Hampshire, this day is traditionally the second Tuesday in March
town report	(noun) A yearly document laying out the management, money matters, and actions of a town
voter turnout	(noun) The number of people who voted in an election divided by the number of people allowed to vote; shown as a percentage
warrant	(noun) A document giving authority to do something
warrant article	(noun) A planned action or discussion item to be considered at a town meeting

