



4-H Legislature Preparation 2 of 4

Project Skills:

1. Government overview & the democratic process (civic/political literacy)
2. Researching and gathering information on issues
3. Apply moral and ethical valuing processes to public policy making
4. Become aware of societal issues and potential solutions.

Life Skills:

1. How to acquire and use information
2. Accepting differences
3. Responsible citizenship
4. Critical thinking

Ages: 14-18

Time: approximately 2 hours

Supplies Needed:

- Laptop/LCD projector
- PowerPoint slide show
 - "Florida Government Overview"
- Whiteboard or newsprint
- *Unlock Your Leadership Potential* Curriculum
- Copies of Handouts 1, 2 & 3

Advance Preparation:

- Read over the lesson plan and make sure you have all the supplies needed.

BACKGROUND

Acquiring & Processing Information

Acquiring information means extracting information and data from the environment. Processing information means critically evaluating, organizing and sensibly using information. We may, of course, acquire information simply for the joy of the process or because some topic or problem interests us. In our citizen role, however, the mere collection of information is often not an especially useful end in itself. Rather, competent citizenship often requires that "information acquired should be used in some purposive manner leading to greater understanding of a situation, an entity, a problem or ideas about productive citizens.

Processing information has become increasingly important. We live in an information-rich culture characterized by public issues that are highly complex and technological in nature. We are often submerged by a torrent of information.

Yet any advantage citizens today might have from this flow of information is frequently offset by the complexity of contemporary issues. Competence in acquiring and processing information involves the capacity to use printed and electronic sources such as online databases, newspapers, magazines and books to obtain factual information and opinions about issues and problems. Such competence also involves the capacity to recognize the advantages and disadvantages of radio, television and the internet as sources of information, and the capacity to acquire information from sources such as government agencies, land-grant universities and community groups. Finally, it involves the capacity to ask appropriate questions.

Competence in acquiring and processing information also requires the capacity to critically evaluate the validity and quality of information acquired. Frequently this information takes the form of assertions about the nature of reality or fact. Upon inquiring, for example, we are told that increasing taxes will help curb inflation, or that the United

States is dangerously behind in its military strength. But...what are the facts?

The citizen's task in assessing the quality of information is often confounded by at least two factors. First, biased, inaccurate or misleading information may be intentionally or unintentionally presented to support a particular factual claim. Proponents, for example, of one or another public policy may present "objective" information which supports only the policy, regulation or legislative action that benefits them. Further, the same information can be and often is introduced to support very different or even contradictory policies.

Second, the technological nature of many issues today means that pertinent information may be highly technical and difficult for a layperson to interpret or evaluate. Confounding this fact is the problem that experts often disagree among themselves about the significance and quality of such technical information.

The capacity to evaluate information in turn involves specific abilities and understandings of the type associated with the process of social scientific inquiry. These include the ability to distinguish normative and empirical statements, some understanding of the logic of the sampling, the ability to detect bias in data, some understanding of the nature of evidence and the like.

Finally, competence in acquiring and processing information requires the capacity to organize, store and use information in relation to given problems. This, in turn, involves specific abilities associated with critical thinking. These include: comparing, classifying, conceptualizing, inferring, hypothesizing, and imagining. To a considerable extent, such thinking processes are interdependent; they cannot be separated¹.

Moral, Ethical Value Making & Making Judgments

Making judgments is one of the most pervasive tasks of citizenship. Competence in making judgments is one of the most pervasive tasks of citizenship. Competence in making judgments is required when citizens evaluate whether it was a mistake for the president to veto a new law or students determine whether it is unfair that the city prohibits bike riding on city sidewalks. Such competence is also required when citizens must determine what judgment criteria or standards to use in a situation. Judgments involve evaluative activity. Judgments are claims about the goodness or badness, the desirability or undesirability, the appropriateness or inappropriateness of given phenomena. To judge a person, institution, policy or decision is to weigh its worth in terms of some set of criteria. Judgments may be rigorous, take a long time, involve an elaborate set of criteria, be based on limited data or intuition, and be made quickly.

Criteria are standards or rules for making judgments; they are assertions about the qualities, characteristics or properties in terms of which a phenomenon will be judged. Criteria help individuals evaluate and determine the worth of something. As individuals develop into adult citizens they learn criteria to make many different judgments associated with the citizen role. These are, in effect, "ready-made" criteria, and they make it easy for people to make judgments quickly. For example, individuals learn that honesty is a standard for judging the worth of a political candidate. Some people are more aware or conscious than others that they are using criteria when they are making judgments as citizens. Conscious use of criteria can result in more effective citizen judgment making⁷.

Values are an important part of our personality and play large roles in determining what types of decisions we make. Clarifying values helps us understand our personal priorities and can aid us in decision-making situations. It can also help us realize how we developed our own personal value system, and shed understanding on how others formulated their own values.

Understanding how value systems are created will assist us in understanding others' points of view, and empathizing with others is important when dealing with conflicts and value differences.

Our values also determine how we will act when faced with an ethical dilemma. An ethical dilemma is a situation in which all of the possible decisions conflict with our values. In solving the dilemma, we must weigh our values and determine which are the most important. Comparing and prioritizing our values is difficult but necessary when making life decisions⁶.

REVIEW FROM PREVIOUS LESSON

Local Government Viewing: Ask for 1-2 volunteers to report the details of a local meeting they viewed.

Branches of Power Game: Ask the participants to name the three branches of government. Ask one youth to describe the gist of the game and whether they would encourage their friends to play it.

Florida Government Overview

Review the Florida Government Powerpoint² slides. A suggested script is provided in the notes section of the slide show.

Compare Federal Government to Florida Legislature

- Ask members to work in pairs and write as many similarities of Florida government to federal government as they can in three minutes. Have each pair announce their similarities, writing them on a white board or newsprint. Give a point to each pair that has a unique similarity (no one else listed the similarity they listed.) The pair with the most similarities wins!

REFLECT & APPLY

What were the most interesting new facts you learned regarding governing bodies?

How can knowing more about a government body help you or your family, neighborhood or community?

Roots of Democracy

Say to the participants, "In this next activity, we are going to begin to understand how our democracy came about and in the activity called "Roots of Democracy." In this activity, you will explore influential individuals and groups that helped shape five key features of American democracy: consent of the governed, representative democracy, rule of law, individual rights, and checks and balances. Students will create a timeline of influences and correctly identify examples of the five features of American democracy in action. Finally, students will participate in a memory matching game that requires them to match purpose of government terms, definitions, and fill-in-the-blank sentences. Do "Roots of Democracy³" lesson from here:

<http://www.icivics.org/teachers/lesson-plans/roots-democracy>

Values & Decision Making

Tell the participants, “As we become good citizens, it is important to recognize what we value as important when we make decisions and judgments.” Do activities 9-10, plus 11, if you have time, in lesson 2 of the *Unlock Your Leadership Potential* Curriculum, found in your county 4-H Extension Center, including the Reflect & Apply sections.

Issue Discovery

Learning strategies to assess community issues and identify people who may be able solve the issues are important to becoming a good citizen. In the 4-H LEG program, the issues are already identified, bills are written and, sometimes, you are even told whether you are a proponent or opponent to the concept.

Tell them, “Once an issue is discovered, or you’ve been told what an issue is, you need to research and gather information.”

DIGGER DEEPER (optional)

Ask students to work individually or in groups and sketch a map of their community – a portion of it if they live in a large, urban area or perhaps the entire county if they live in a rural area. They can use icons to add details to their maps. Have them make a legend for their map. They can also add pictures/drawings as insets. After they have finished creating the map of their community as it is, ask them to add or change things to make it how they’d like it to be. This is their vision. They can include ideas that are wild or realistic.

Ask the youth to look at their maps and identify as many public issues as they can. For example, if the youth drew kids hanging out in the street, maybe recreation or safety is an issue. If they imagine their community with clean lakes and woods, the environment might be an issue. Ask the participants questions to describe as many issues as they can in their community⁹.

Researching & Gathering Information

Tell the participants, “Most county libraries have a myriad of reference materials available for their patrons, including subscriptions to multiple online databases. For example, here is what the Broward County library states, “The subscription databases have been selected and evaluated by professional librarians. The information comes from authoritative sources, and is updated regularly. We recommend starting your search here rather than conducting a general search on the Internet, or using one of many popular search engines that do not evaluate or check the information they post for accuracy or currency⁵.”

“These days, we often think the internet is the only source of information but the public library has a myriad of resources, many of which you can access online with your library card and others only in the library. Additionally, you can interview people, use the newspaper and phone book.” Distribute Handout 1, 2 & 3. Use these resources to begin gathering data on the bills in Manual 2 for Florida 4-H Legislature.

HOMEWORK/DIGGING DEEPER:

1. Ask the participants to review Manual 2 for Florida 4-H Legislature. "Begin reading the bills and determine which bills and/or committees interest you. Use the handouts provided in this lesson to begin gathering information for or against at two different bills from Manual 2 before the next training session.
2. Go to <http://www.icivics.org/games> and play the game: "Cast Your Vote."

Sources:

1. Remy, Richard C. Handbook of Basic Citizenship Competencies: Guidelines for Comparing Materials, Assessing Instruction and Setting Goals. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1980. Print, p. 18-20.
2. Simmons, Matthew. "An Introduction to Florida Government." 4-H Intermediate State. Camp Ocala 4-H Center, Altoona. 14 Feb. 2009. Lecture.
3. "Roots of Democracy." *ICivics: The Democracy Lab*. Web. 04 Apr. 2011. <http://www.icivics.org/teachers/lesson-plans/roots-democracy>
4. Simonne, and Bobroff, L. B.. (2006). Identifying Accurate Internet Resources for Nutrition, Food Safety and Health Demonstration (FCS8798). Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Retrieved May 10, 2011, from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy827>
5. "Broward County - Reference Databases." *Broward County Library*. Broward County Government. Web. 10 May 2011. <http://www.browardlibrary.org/other/aboutonlineresources.html>.
6. Rutledge, John. *Unlock Your Leadership Potential*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida IFAS Extension, 1997. Lesson 2, Activities 9-11. Print.
7. Remy, Richard C. Handbook of Basic Citizenship Competencies: Guidelines for Comparing Materials, Assessing Instruction and Setting Goals. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1980. Print, p. 33-34.
8. "Issue Discovery." *Engaging Youth, Serving Community*. Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Council, 2006. Section 7, Page 4. Print.
9. Bass, Melissa. "First Steps Out the Door." *Citizenship: Public Adventures*. Minneapolis, MN: National 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System, 2005. page17. Print.

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Library Resources

In-Library Materials

Robert's Rules of Order

Florida Statistical Abstract

(updated annual with demographical information)

Information Plus issue guides

Guidelines for Bill Drafting

(also available here:

http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/contentViewer.aspx?Category=PublicGuide&File=About_The_Legislative_Process_Guidelines_for_Bill_Drafting.htm)

Library Databases

Gale InfoTrac

Gale General Reference Center

Gale Opposing Viewpoints

NewsBank Archive: America's Newspapers

Legislative resources Online

Online Sunshine

<http://www.leg.state.fl.us>

(Select Senate or House for member, committee and bill information)

National Conference of State Legislatures

<http://www.ncsl.org/>

(Discussion of state issues and links to other state legislatures.)

The Buzz: Florida Politics News from the St. Pete Times Staff

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/the-buzz-florida-politics/>

(Political blogposts with insider comments. Often Entertaining.)

Other Resources

ipl2

(A public service organization and learning/teaching environment. The "librarians index to the internet.")

<http://www.ipl.org/>



Tips to Help You as You Gather Information⁸

- Be respectful of all stakeholders (stakeholders: one who involved in or affected by a course of action.) As you go about gathering information, always remember that you are trying to make a difference – not a judgment. For example, it is NOT respectful to say, “The park is a real dump and we think it needs to be cleaned up.” It is respectful to ask residents and officials, “What improvements would you like to see in your neighborhood park?”
- Use the phone book (paper or on-line) to find names and phone numbers of agencies. There are sections for government, associations, clubs and businesses.
- Call your local newspaper. In addition to printing information on clubs or agencies, they may also have a community/city editor or staff person who knows what is going on in your community.
- Call upon local officials. It is great to seek help from Congressional representatives and County Supervisors/Commissioners. However, local officials such as City Council members or school members are often more accessible and willing to help.



Internet Safety for Parents and Youth Leaders⁴

Researching information on the Internet exposes young people to a vast amount of information from a wide array of sources, many of which they would otherwise not be exposed to. Parents and youth leaders should obtain information on Internet safety from the FBI website at <http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm> before the young people begin an Internet search.

How to Identify Reliable Internet Sources

Several Web search engines (e.g. Google, AltaVista, Excite, Infoseek, Lycos, Yahoo, and WebCrawler) are available for exploring the Internet. All of them offer basic searches based on key words. Most of these search engines allow users to specify search options such as simple, advanced, or refined searches using Boolean operators (“AND,” “OR,” “AND NOT”), which are commonly used in traditional database searches. However, each of the search engines may reach different Internet domains. Once sources of information are identified, only reliable Internet sources should be used. As a general rule, reliable sources come from Web site addresses that end with “.gov,” “.edu,” and “.org.” Some “.com” sites contain reliable information, but may have a commercial bias. MedlinePlus recently released a tutorial to help people search the Web, available at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/training/trainers.html>. The tutorial also is available from the Information for Librarians and Trainers page at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthywebsurfing.html>.

Sites Ending in “.gov”

Government Web sites are designated as “.gov.” In the United States, “.gov” sites can belong to federal, state, or local governments. These sites should provide reliable and unbiased information. However, one should notice the date the information was posted to the Web site. If the goal is to get the latest information on particular issues in food science, food technology, nutrition, food safety, and health, the best sources to start with are federal government Web sites. State and local government Web sites provide information that pertains to state and local issues and interests. In order to ensure accuracy, Internet information should be verified by checking with printed information, such as research journals, or consulting with experts in that field of study. Florida 4-H youth also can contact the county Extension staff to obtain information for their projects. Each state in the United States has at least one Land Grant University, so youth in all states can contact their county Extension staffs, who receive information and training from state specialists at their Land Grant University. Food safety/nutrition state specialists can be found through the federal government Web site at http://www.csrees.usda.gov/qlinks/partners/state_partners.html.

Sites Ending in “.edu”

This designates a university or other educational institution Web site. In general, information from “.edu” Web sites is based on research findings that are unbiased and reviewed by other experts in that field. As with all sites, be sure to check the date when the information was posted to the Web site.

Sites Ending in “.org”

Web sites run by groups such as professional organizations, groups of governments such as the United Nations (UN), multi-agency groups, nonprofit organizations, consumer groups, trade organizations, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have a “.org” designation. It is advisable to screen these Web sites very carefully before citing the information. One way of screening information is to cross-check the information with one or more reliable sources or to check with experts in the field. The Web sites of organizations such as the American Heart Association (<http://americanheart.org>), the International Association of Food Protection (<http://www.foodprotection.org>) and the Institute of Food Technologists (<http://www.ift.org>) usually provide accurate, comprehensive, and reliable information.

Sites Ending in “.com”

Commercial sites have a “.com” designation. Commercial Web sites sometimes provide useful and reliable information. However, one needs to evaluate the information carefully. Commercial sites may be more interested in selling product(s) or promoting their opinion than in providing accurate and unbiased information.