



Lesson 2

Classroom Common Council

Overview

Vel Phillips served on the Milwaukee Common Council for 15 years, helping develop policies that impacted those in her community. In this activity, students will evaluate the power local government has on people's lives as they learn about and form a common council within their classroom.

Lesson Standards

Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies

Standard C: Political Science and Citizenship

C.12.8 Locate, organize, analyze, and use information from various sources to understand an issue of public concern, take a position, and communicate the position

C.12.10 Identify ways people may participate effectively in community affairs and the political process

C.12.14 Explain and analyze how different political and social movements have sought to mobilize public opinion and obtain governmental support in order to achieve their goals

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Lesson Targets

Students will be able to define common council, ward, and policy, as well as describe the impact of local government after viewing *Vel Phillips: Dream Big Dreams*, segment *1956 First Campaign* through segment *1967 Open Housing*.

Students will demonstrate their understanding of how local policy is created. They will role-play a community with a common council. During the role-play, the following will occur:

- The classroom will be divided into wards.
- The students in each ward will create a list of issues affecting their ward and develop a new policy they would like implemented in the classroom.
- The students in each ward will vote to select an alderperson to represent their ward on the common council.
- Each alderperson will share with the common council an issue and a proposed new policy.
- The alderpersons will debate and vote on three proposed policies brought to the common council.

Materials

- *Vel Phillips: Dream Big Dreams*, segments: *1956 First Campaign* through *1967 Open Housing* (11:08-41:14)
- *Classroom Common Council Guide* (provided, one needed for each student)

Teaching Guide



Classroom Common Council - Lesson 2 cont.

Lesson Procedure

First, assess the students' understanding of what a common council is and its purpose. The students may respond with: *A common council is a group of elected officials that represent people in their city, town, district, or ward. The common council works together to set the governing policies of the city or town.* (If students do not know what a common council is or what its purpose is, this can be done after watching the video segments in the next step.)

Next, show students *Vel Phillips: Dream Big Dreams*, segment *1956 First Campaign* through segment *1967 Open Housing*. Have students add to their common council description using information from the segments. If students were not able to write a description previously, have them now write one.

Review with students Vel's history on the Milwaukee Common Council. To assist the teacher, the following is a summary of Vel's history on the Milwaukee Common Council:

When Vel Phillips vied for a seat on the Milwaukee Common Council in 1956, she was attempting to secure a position on the most powerful committee in the city. As a legislative body, it was the common council's job to create the laws that would be implemented across all 19 wards in the City of Milwaukee. A ward is a term used to describe the boundaries of a particular neighborhood. The citizens living in a ward elect their council representative. In 1956, Vel was running to represent the 2nd ward. In 2016 the council was comprised of 15 individuals representing 15 distinct districts, and it still functions as it did over 50 years ago.

Those elected in local elections make decisions that have a large impact on people's daily activities. For example, local councils decide parking regulations, noise ordinances and approve building permits. In Vel's time, they also decided where people of differing ethnicities could live. All of these are issues debated by members of the common council.

Facilitate a discussion with the class to assess students' understanding of common council, ward, and local regulation by asking students questions such as:

- What is a ward?
- What is a citizen's duty living in a ward?
- What does a common council do? What is its purpose?
- Who develops federal legislation? Who develops local legislation?
- Why do local elections greatly impact people's daily lives?
- Describe Vel's influence while serving on the Milwaukee Common Council.

Next, divide the students into wards so they can role-play a classroom common council. While doing so, be sure to create inequalities or situations that will cause conflict or disagreement within the classroom. This will reflect how Vel had to address the unique housing issue affecting her ward. For example, create a ward that stretches across the back of the classroom, and develop a rule that only students with brown hair may sit in that ward. It is recommended the teacher draws the wards' boundaries on a seating chart and disseminates it to the students. Have each student sit in their assigned ward.

Teaching Guide



Classroom Common Council - Lesson 2 cont.

Provide each student a *Classroom Common Council Guide*. Within the students' wards, they should first answer the questions in *Part 1*, which will serve as an assessment of their understanding of common council.

Next using *Classroom Common Council: Part 2*, students should elect an alderperson as their ward's representative.

With the members of their ward, students should inform their elected alderperson of their ward's concerns or issues. The students must record their responses in *Classroom Common Council: Part 3*. Students will also vote on which issue they want their alderperson to take before the common council, and write a new proposed policy that would resolve the issue.

A common council meeting will now be held.

It may be helpful to rearrange the desks so that the alderpersons are in one part of the classroom and the remaining students (the ward members) form an audience.

The alderpersons should first elect a council president by nominating various alderpersons, and then voting. Next, each alderperson will share with the council his or her ward's issue, as well as the ward's proposed policy. All students should record each alderperson's issue and proposed policy in *Classroom Common Council: Part 4*.

After all have shared, the alderpersons will vote on which three issues to address. For each topic, each alderpersons will testify on behalf of his or her ward members. After, the alderpersons will vote on the proposed policy. The teacher will assist the council president in moderating the testimony and voting. Continue to hold the common council session until all three issues have been addressed and voted on. If time allows, continue discussing and voting on other issues alderpersons brought to the common council.

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name

Classroom Common Council Guide

Part 1: Answer the following questions.

1. What is a ward?

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2. What is a citizen's duty in a ward?

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3. What is the purpose of a common council?

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4. Describe how we get *federal* legislation?

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5. Describe how we get *local* legislation.

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6. How do local elections impact people’s daily lives?

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Analyze your ward’s boundaries and respond to the following.

1. How does the size and population of the wards differ?

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2. How will the ward’s size and population affect any issues it takes before a common council?

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Part 2: Elect an alderperson.

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record your alderperson’s name

Part 3: In your ward, host a local meeting, communicating specific issues or concerns from the ward to the alderperson. List your ward's issues and concerns.

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From the list above, circle the issue your ward thinks is most important and should be debated during the common council meeting.

Reflect on the chosen issue and write a new policy that your ward would like to propose to the common council.

proposed policy:

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Part 4: At the common council meeting, have each alderperson share his or her ward's issue and proposed policy. Record the issues and policies.

Ward 1 issue:

proposed policy:

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Ward 2 issue:

proposed policy:

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Ward 3 issue:

proposed policy:

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Ward 4 issue:

proposed policy:

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Ward 5 issue:

proposed policy:

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Ward 6 issue:

proposed policy:

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Ward 7 issue:

proposed policy:

Ward 8 issue:

proposed policy:

Once each alderperson has presented, a vote will be held by the council to determine which issues to address. Circle the three issues that will be formally addressed. The council president will choose one of the three chosen issues to discuss. Each alderperson will share an opinion about the issue as a representative of their ward. Afterward, the alderpersons must vote to either adopt or reject the proposed policy.