

DOES MY VOTE COUNT?????

Learning Objective(s): The student will

- A. Understand the importance of voter participation.
- B. Analyze and prioritize city government services.

TEKS: Govt.15A; Govt.16A

Materials Needed: Copies of “Apathyville, U.S.A.” for each student (attached)

Teaching Strategy:

1. Give each student a copy of “Apathyville, U.S.A.” to follow along as the teacher reads the following scenario to the class.

APATHYVILLE, U.S.A.

In the months before the city elections, a small group of citizens in Apathyville, U.S.A. began a vigorous campaign for major changes for their city. At the center of this campaign was a proposed tax roll-back to provide relief to the citizens, who they felt were being swamped by higher and higher taxes. Especially vocal in this group were citizens who were living on fixed incomes. As the elections neared it became obvious that the small group was growing in strength. When Election Day arrived, the turn out of voters was small (as often happens in local elections). The roll-back proposal passed by only five votes, and the special interest group celebrated its victory, looking forward to lower taxes.

Following the scenario are ten services provided by most cities. Students should individually rank these services one-to-ten, one being the most important to keep and ten the least important. Additionally, they should think of other possible services that could be cut.

2. Explain to the class they will now be acting as the city council. They will be responsible for cutting city services to balance the budget reflecting the lower tax revenue. Divide the class into small groups of four or five and allow them approximately 20 to 30 minutes to develop their plan. They must agree on cutting five services from the list. They should also decide on one of their original ideas for services that could be reduced or cut to present to the class.

3. Allow each group approximately three minutes to explain its plan listing the five services that will be cut along with the rationale for their choices. They should also present their new idea for cutting costs. After each group has presented its plan, have the class vote on the one plan they will adopt as the best to balance the city's budget.
4. After the simulation, the teacher should ask the students the following debriefing questions:
 - If the election were held today knowing what you now know, would you have voted for the roll-back? Defend your answer.
 - How important are groups with special interests in a representative democracy?
 - What are the responsibilities of a citizen in a representative democracy?
 - Has your opinion of voting changed or been confirmed after this simulation? How?

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Below are a list of possible city services that might be cut to balance the city budget. Rank the services from one to ten, with one being the most important service to keep and ten being the least important. Additionally, think of other possible services that could be cut.

- _____A. Close the public library.
- _____B. Close the city swimming pool.
- _____C. Discontinue maintenance of lawns and landscaping on city property.
- _____D. Reduce the number of police and fireman.
- _____E. Close the Senior Center.
- _____F. Change the garbage collection to every two weeks.
- _____G. Postpone the repair of local streets.
- _____H. Cancel plans for the annual city Fourth of July Celebration
- _____I. Cancel plans for the building of the new water treatment plant.
- _____J. Cancel the city's recycling program.

Other possible cuts: