Living Democracy - Teacher Overview
Town Meeting Unit
(Developed by the Living Democracy Committee July, 05)*

The purpose of this unit is to teach students about local government. It is a goal of the Acton Public Schools to increase student participation in service learning projects. Community service learning connects curriculum and community service.

Presented in this mini unit are five sessions of approximately 60 minutes each. Each session serves as a guide for teachers. All 5th graders are expected to participate in a culminating mock town meeting with the support of the Acton Area League of Women Voters.

As part of the town meeting project, students take on the challenge of educating their parents and other members of the community in the processes of town meeting and the importance of participating in local governmental decisions. Students develop skits, make posters and brochures explaining the town meeting to the audience. Some classes also participate in voter a registration drive - “Nag the Vote” campaign in the fall.

Funding for this project is provided by The Massachusetts Department of Education through the support of Learn and Serve America.

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This grid is from the APS Social Studies Curriculum Frameworks.

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<th>Essential Understandings</th>
<th>Key Concepts</th>
<th>Learning Objectives</th>
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<td>Local Government</td>
<td>▪ How do societies organize to govern themselves?</td>
<td>▪ The type of town government established here during colonial times is still used today in Acton.</td>
<td>▪ Acton town government is composed of various elected, appointed, and directly democratic elements. Each has specific responsibilities.</td>
<td>▪ Town meeting</td>
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<td>▪ How does your town government work?</td>
<td>▪ Town government is one American form of local government. Local governments share responsibilities with State and Federal governments.</td>
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<td>▪ Board of Selectmen</td>
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<td>▪ What does it do?</td>
<td>▪ To make town government function, citizens must give time and hard work; they must collaborate and compromise.</td>
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<td>▪ School Committee</td>
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<td>▪ What is the role of the citizen in town government?</td>
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<td>▪ Finance Committee</td>
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<td>▪ Superintendent of Schools</td>
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<td>▪ Rules of debate</td>
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<td>▪ Decision-making</td>
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**Session 1: Introduction to Living Democracy Unit**
- Right to vote activity (see attachment)
- Who can vote now - eligibility
- Hand out voter registration card to each student to have unregistered parents fill out
- Discussion of current voter participation and purpose of unit: to increase voter registration and participation at Town Meeting.

**Session 2: Local Government**
- Introduction to vocabulary in Grade 5 Mock Town Meeting packet provided by the Acton League of Women Voters, examples include BINGO, Jeopardy, Card game, Pantomime, Crossword Puzzle, Word Search (http://school.discovery.com/), Computer Lesson from the Acton Website http://www.acton-ma.gov/ (under board/committees link)
- Use the "Know Your Town" booklet with chart on local government and Acton town officials, page 8.

**Session 3: Town Meeting – Mock Warrant**
- Using the materials prepared by the Acton League of Women Voters introduce the problem
- Read and discuss the articles
- Students can highlight terms they don't know or understand and use this to begin discussion of trash terminology/vocabulary
- Homework: Discuss the problem with their parents and how they feel about the issue (could be a written assignment or verbal)

**Session 4: Discussion of Homework and Other Environmental Issues**
- Review and discuss homework
- Discussion of recycling and its impact the town of Acton, composting, etc. as necessary
- Students should make a decision about solving the problem making sure to include the cons to their choice and the choice of others (you might want to think about anonymity so that students don't make their opinion based on their friend's opinion)
- Students might want to make an index card listing their opinion and some facts to support their choice
- Teachers might want to assign roles to their students in order to consider other points of view of other town citizens (examples; elderly, people living in Acton apartments/condos, single parents, families with no car, families with lots of infants requiring diapers, young executive couples that travel with probably less trash, long time Acton citizens in a retirement community, an “undecided” group, people who don't like change, people with a second home, town employees who might...
be affected by a change in trash disposal). Also, a student could develop his or her own character via a “character resume.”

**Session 5: Town Meeting**

- Go over Parliamentary Procedures which discusses the "rules" for the running of Town Meeting (from League of Women Voter's package)
- Write questions for committee members panel (examples: What options are really happening? How else could the land be used if it isn't a transfer station? Any specific finance related questions.
- Discussion of amendments (you might, if time allows, consider selecting a few students to prepare an amendment to the articles) For Teacher Info ONLY: In Acton, amendments may be prepared in advance and submitted to the Moderator prior to the meeting so that the amendment may be introduced to the meeting members. However, at Town Meeting individuals may just stand up and present an amendment at any time without preparation beforehand. This is poorly received by the membership and is only encouraged if a group of students can't come to a consensus.
- Visual displays, posters, brochures, photographs, etc., including a computer lab session, to support your Mock Town Meeting may be included and/or made at this time

**Other Options**

- One school selected 5th grade students to make a presentation at the Mock Town meeting on a) all people associated with town meeting: town moderator, committee members, board of selectmen, etc.) b) the legislative, judicial, executive branches and their role at the local, state and national level and c) what is the purpose of town meeting, when is it, where is it held, what items get voted on, etc.
- Another school selected 5th grade students into three groups as follows: a) brochures, posters and visual displays on voter information and registration, town meeting posters b) mock town meeting participants who presented the debate and c) dramatic presentation before town meeting such as skits or game shows, songs. Everyone was able to vote at the meeting despite his particular group involvement.
- Another school created cross grouping with all three classes for citizen roles: in all three 5th grade classes, for example, all the “elderly” constituents met to discuss their points of view.