



FOLLOW THE BILL — AN ISSUE INVESTIGATION

Subject: Social Studies

Skills: Action, Analysis, Application, Citizenship, Comparison, Decision Making, Description, Discussion, Evaluation, Gathering, Interpretation, Interview, Investigation, Listening, Organization, Problem Solving, Reporting, Responsibility, Small Group

Duration: Highly variable depending on depth, but approximately 5-10 hourly sessions and weekly or monthly re-checks on the progress of pending legislation

Setting: Classroom, Library, and if possible, Computer Room

Materials:

- writing materials
- telephone
- stamps and envelopes
- copies of the worksheet, Issue Investigation: A Land Use Legislative Bill, for each pair of students
- large paper (butcher-block or newsprint) for student groups of 4-5
- art supplies to make brochures
- OPTIONAL: computer, internet, and email

Michigan Curriculum Framework Content Standards and Benchmarks:

- **Social Studies VI.1.LE 1:** Strand VI. Public Discourse and Decision Making, Standard 1. Identifying and Analyzing Issues, Benchmark LE 1. Pose local, state, and national policy issues as questions.
- **Social Studies VI.1.LE 2:** Strand VI. Public Discourse and Decision Making, Standard 1. Identifying and Analyzing Issues, Benchmark LE 2. Explain how a particular public issue became a problem and why people disagree about it.
- **Social Studies VI.1.LE 3:** Strand VI. Public Discourse and Decision Making, Standard 1. Identifying and Analyzing Issues, Benchmark LE 3. Evaluate possible resolutions of a public issue.
- **Social Studies VI.2.LE 1:** Strand VI. Public Discourse and Decision Making, Standard 2. Group Discussion, Benchmark LE 1. Engage each other in conversations which attempt to clarify and resolve issues pertaining to local, state, and national policy.
- **Social Studies VI.3.LE 1:** Strand VI. Public Discourse and Decision Making, Standard 3. Persuasive writing, Benchmark LE 1. Compose a short essay expressing a decision on a local, state, or national policy issue.
- **Social Studies VI.1.MS 1:** Public Discourse and Decision Making, Standard 1. State an issue clearly as a question of public policy. Benchmark MS 1. State public policy issues and their related ethical definitional, and factual issues as questions.
- **Social Studies VI.1.MS 2:** Public Discourse and Decision Making, Standard 1. State an issue clearly as a question of public policy. Benchmark MS 2. Trace the origins of a public issue.

Kent County Collaborative Core Curriculum (KC⁴)

- **Social Studies:** 4:8
6:2, 6:9, 6:10
7:4, 7:9
8:3, 8:9

OVERVIEW

In this issue investigation project, students practice US citizenship when they identify, follow, analyze, evaluate and lobby for or against pending legislation affecting a land use issue.

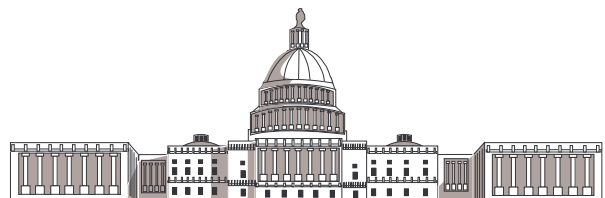
OBJECTIVES

After participating in this activity, students should be able to:

- Identify sources of information concerning land use issues and related legislation.
- Compare differing social and political viewpoints concerning land use issues and related legislation.
- Evaluate legislative bills and possible resolutions to land use issues.
- Feel able and confident to follow legislation affecting public issues.
- Identify where private citizens can have an impact on the legislative process.

BACKGROUND

Students can study the legislative process and practice **citizenship** while inquiring into land use issues. When state **legislatures** meet, the public can learn what **bills** are under construction. Usually, it is possible to contact the “bill” room at the state legislature. In Michigan, a web site is available at <<http://www.michiganlegislature.org/>>. The Michigan Legislature web site has a search engine and will allow visitors to type in key words that will find all the bills related to those words. More specifically, a visitor to the site can look for bills the Land Use and Environment Committee is reviewing. The *United Growth for Kent County* legislative liaison will also be able to help you identify bills that are specifically important to



land use. Private groups and organizations watch the legislature and can also be asked to help identify land use-related bills.

Young people can prepare themselves for their voting rights and political responsibilities by monitoring the legislative process. Specifically, they can follow a bill of interest to them in its course toward becoming law. This activity is best done over a one to two month (or longer) period in order to monitor the bill's progress in the legislature. The students should select a local land use issue important to them with related legislation pending.

Some proposed laws directly affect land use. Other laws considered by a state legislature may have a strong effect on land resources, although the laws may not be related directly to land use.

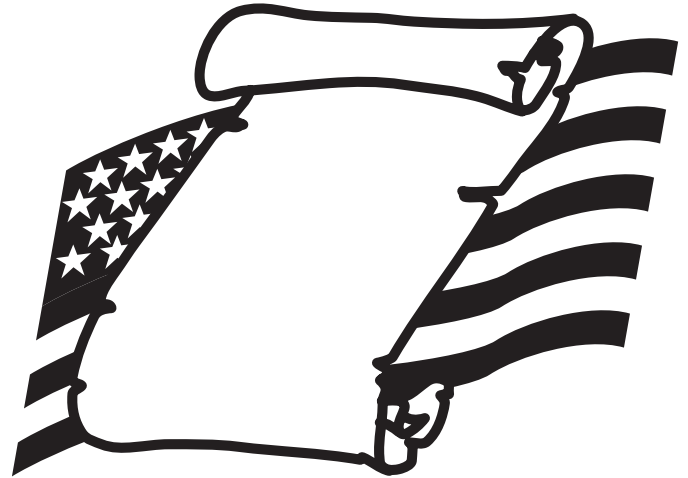
PROCEDURE

PART ONE: IDENTIFYING LOCAL LAND USE ISSUES

1. Inform the students that they are beginning an issue investigation project that involves studying the legislature.
2. Start the students off by identifying and analyzing land use issues that are on both a local and state level. List student answers on the board or overhead. Encourage discussion with the following questions:
 - What do you see happening in our community? *New houses being built, vacant buildings, road construction, trash buildup...*
 - What might be some local land use issues? *Loss of farmland and green space, sprawling commercial strips, big-box businesses contributing to sprawl, housing developments spreading out, inner city abandonment...*
 - What might be some issues caused by sprawl? *Loss of habitat, loss of scenery, traffic congestion, lack of public transportation, poor air and water quality, loss of community...*
 - Why might people disagree? *Developers want to make money, neighbors want to keep their community the way it is, some people might want a golf course and others want a mall, some people want big houses spread out and others want smaller, closer houses with nature and bike trails around the development, farmers want to keep their land but disagree with surrounding development or land taxes...*
 - How did this issue become a problem?
3. Summarize the discussion of land use issues and lead the students in determining a few of the local issues (one or two) that they would like to pursue or that interest them.
4. For homework, assign students to list two agencies or people interested in land use issues that they can call or look up on the internet for information. Also, assign the students to write down

two questions that they would ask the professionals in order to find out more information about land use issues. If needed, prompt the students with a few suggestions of agencies and sample questions. •Contacts: The State Legislature, Bureau of Land Management, Grand Valley Metro Council, local Land Conservancy, Michigan Environmental Council, Michigan Farmland and Community Alliance, Michigan Land Use Institute, and local or regional planning commission.

•Questions: Is there anybody working on this issue? What is being done about this problem? What are the viewpoints or arguments on this issue? Are there any laws, bills, or legislation about this issue?



PART TWO: ISSUE INVESTIGATION

1. Instruct students to use their homework assignments to contribute to class discussion.
2. Make a composite list on the board of all the agencies and people the students suggest to contact about their land use issue. Make another list of all of their issue investigation questions that they would like to ask the professionals. Promote discussion and add additional contacts and questions to the lists to make the investigation complete. ***Be sure to include questions that will disclose the viewpoints on both sides of the issue, and questions that inquire about legislative bills.*** Ask students to put a star next to the questions and contacts that will offer the best information.
3. Allow pairs of students to choose a contact from the list to gather information from, and have them copy down the questions that they want to ask the professionals. NOTE: Use teacher judgment as to how many questions the students will be able to ask in a phone interview or find out from the Internet. If one agency has a lot of information to offer, allow additional student pairs to call the same agency, but require them to ask different questions.
4. Either in the library or for homework, assign students to find out how to contact the agency professionals. Students should be able to find local

phone numbers, web site addresses, and email addresses.

- Depending on the availability of school phones and Internet access, have student pairs contact their agency and get answers to their issue investigation questions either during school or at home.

PART THREE: ISSUE INVESTIGATION CONTINUED

- Draw a summary chart on the board (Figure 1) and allow the student pairs to fill in the information that they gathered from their investigation. Important points to remember are: why people disagree and if there is any pending legislation that attempts to resolve the issue.

- Lead discussion and ask the students if this is the end of the

the students already have the number of the bill, that can also be typed in and the bill and its information will be posted.

- Have the students find out more about the bills affecting their issue. Have them list some key words that they would like to try in the Michigan Legislature search engine, or assign them a bill and its number to search for complete information. If the Internet is not available, determine who will call the state legislature when it is in session (usually Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday) to find out what bills have been introduced that attempt to resolve the land use issue that the students are investigating. Have the students ask for copies of complete information on the bill(s) to be sent to the class. Or, allow students to print copies from the Internet.

Figure 1. Issue Investigation Information Summary

Agency Name	Contact Person(s)	Phone # Web Site Email Address	Facts about the Issue	Viewpoints on the Issue	Legislative Bills
1.					
2. ...					
...12.					

line or if there is more to this issue. Help them to determine that the next step is to investigate the legislation (or bills) that involve the issue. This will be tricky for the students because reading and understanding the language of the bills will be difficult, but not impossible if studied and explained.

- Ask students how they might find out more about the bills that are listed on the board or about their land use issue. If there are no bills listed on the board, ask them where they might find out if there are bills about their issue. The answer to both questions will be at the State legislative office. The easiest and most unobtrusive way to find out about all the bills in the legislature is to access their Internet web site. In Michigan, the web address is <<http://www.michiganlegislature.org/>>. The Michigan Legislature web site has a search engine and will allow students to type in key words that will find all the bills related to those key words. For example, "land use" can be typed in and related bills will be listed. Otherwise, look at the Land Use and Environment Committee for a list of bills that it is reviewing. Many of the bills will be revisions or amendments, and some will be new bills. If

PART FOUR: UNDERSTANDING A LEGISLATIVE BILL

- Summarize for students the bills that affect their land use issue, and have them determine which bills (one or two) they are most interested in pursuing. Practice the Democratic way and allow students to vote on the bills that they want to pursue. (As an extension, allow groups of students to campaign for a certain bill to study.)
- From the Internet or hard copies on paper, assign students to find out specific information about the land use bill(s). (Have them keep a file that includes worksheets and class notes for each bill.) Using the worksheet, **Issue Investigation: A Land Use Legislative Bill**, have students begin to search for the following information:
 - the legislative bill title and number
 - when it was introduced in the legislature, by whom, and where
 - whether the bill is an amendment, and if so, the original title and number
 - the reason the bill was introduced

- the issue the bill attempts to resolve
- facts that support or contradict the bill
- its route to and through committees
- when it passes through the house or senate
- when it is signed into law, or if not signed into law, what happens to it (A status sheet is usually published on a daily basis when a legislature is in session.)

3. Students will need help with the technical text that legally explains the bill. Allow them to read sections of the bill and see if they can figure out what it is trying to say, but avoid letting them get frustrated. Help them to determine what the bill will do to resolve the issue. Columns with the headings “This Bill will:” and “This Bill will not:” or “Pros and Cons” may offer them a little more clarity. Allow them to determine if this is a good solution for their issue. NOTE: Pay particular attention to amendments. Amendments to the original bill may drastically alter the intent. See if amendments improve or hamper the intent, and attempt to determine if an amendment is intended to improve, or actually to “kill” the legislation.

PART FIVE: INVESTIGATING AND ANALYZING THE LEGISLATIVE BILL

1. Once the students understand the bill and its resolution to the issue, find out if they would vote for or against the bill. Before taking an official classroom vote, allow students to debate their viewpoints.
2. Whether or not the bill “passes” in the classroom, ask the students if there are any new questions they have about the bill or its issue. Write these new questions on the board.
3. Pair students together who voted the same way on the bill. Match students to contacts according to how the students voted on the bill. For example, environmentally pro students should contact conservation groups. Note that the following examples include contacts that may have opposing viewpoints because it is important to see all sides of an issue.
 - agency personnel
 - legislative liaison at the Bureau of Land Management
 - members of private conservation groups
 - the person who introduced the legislation
 - a representative of local business interests, as appropriate
 - people “on the street” who may or may not know about the proposed legislation

From the board, students should select a few new questions (a reasonable number) to ask their contacts. The information students gather should help clarify the bill, gather viewpoints and opinions about the bill, or add supporting facts. NOTE: Before the students contact any organization or individual, make sure you go over their questions in advance. You want to make sure that the students are adequately prepared to impose on these people again for information. Secondly, if one group is

contacted twice, make sure different questions are asked.

4. Form student pairs into “Interest Groups” to lobby for or against the bill in a short presentation in front of the class. (If everyone is in agreement for or against the bill, form general groups.) In their small groups, have the students review, discuss, and summarize the information that they gathered about the bill and the issue it attempts to resolve. Or, let them read from their homework the information that they gathered from their contacts.
5. Once the student groups have discussed their new information, have each lobby group write out their best information on a piece of butcher-block paper to present. Ask groups to include some or all of the following information on their paper for their lobby presentation for or against the bill (you may add or delete items to accommodate your classroom):
 - additional explanations that will help students understand the bill
 - facts or data for or against the bill (list 1-3 as grade-level appropriate)
 - viewpoints or opinions for or against the bill (list 1-3 as grade-level appropriate)
 - state whether they are for or against the bill
 - state the reason why they are for or against the bill

6. After lobby groups have presented their information, lead the class in clarifying and summarizing the new information that was gathered about the bill, and then take a second and final vote about the bill.



PART SIX: LOBBYING FOR OR AGAINST A BILL

1. For a group project or individually, have students develop brochures about the bill. Pass around samples of three- or four-fold brochures, and tell them that brochures might include some or all of the following information (you may stipulate requirements for the brochure depending on the grade level):
 - Title
 - Headings and subheadings
 - Pictures
 - Logos
 - Name, number, and description of the legislative bill
 - Facts with bullet points
 - Contact information: names, addresses, phone numbers, web sites

- Relevant Dates
- Legislator who proposed bill
- Where to get additional information
- Opinions on the bill with supporting information
- Developers of the brochure (names, grade, and school)

2. Make photocopies of the students' brochures (or vote on the best one) and pass them out to interested organizations or legislators that might welcome the information. Be sure to point out that by sending the brochures to their legislative representatives, they are possibly making an impact on the outcome of legislation. Ask the students where else they might want to put their brochures to make an impact (PTA meetings, city hall, public library, etc.). (Get permission first.) As a thank you to helpful agencies and people, send copies to them also.

3. Students should check periodically (weekly or monthly) on the status of the legislation they are studying, its progress, and the issues affecting it. Call the Michigan legislative office or access their Internet Web Site at <<http://www.michiganlegislature.org/>>.

4. As a conclusion to the land use issue investigation, assign students to write a short essay on the outcome or status of the legislative bill. Ask them to include all the requirements (grade level appropriate) for an essay.

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

1. Evaluate student "Contact and Question Development" assignments from Part One.
2. Evaluate answers from the student pairs' contact with agency personnel in Part Two.
3. Evaluate the students' Issue Investigation: Land Use Legislative Bills worksheet in Part Four.
4. Evaluate student participation and presentations in group "Lobby" presentation in Part Five.
5. Evaluate student brochures in Part Six for completeness and accuracy.
6. Evaluate the students' short essays in Part Six for grade-level appropriate requirements.
7. Ask students to identify a bill that has been introduced into the state legislature that will affect land resources.
 - A. Describe it.
 - B. What is the issue it attempts to resolve?
 - C. List one or two informational facts.
 - D. Do you think this bill should be passed? State one or two reasons for your answer.
8. Ask students to describe opposing viewpoints that relate to this bill by finishing the following statements:

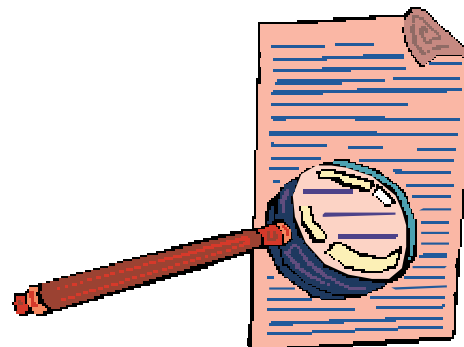
- A. A viewpoint in favor of this bill is... This is because...
- B. A viewpoint opposed to this bill is... This is because...

9. Ask students to name three agencies or people that you could contact in order to find out about land use related legislative bills.
10. Ask students to list the actions they took to investigate an issue and influence legislation. Answers will vary; look for thoughtful input. (Teachers may also ask students to describe those actions.)

OR Teachers may opt to scramble the following actions and then have the students list them in order. Issue Investigation: Identify the issue, Investigate the issue, Evaluate possible resolutions to the issue.

Influence Legislation: Identify the issue, Identify the bill that affects the issue, Investigate the bill, Evaluate the bill, Lobby for or against the bill by distributing information.





Adaptations/Extensions

1. A personal letter is usually the most effective way of contacting your legislator, whether in Lansing, or Washington. Write a letter to a legislator expressing your personal opinion about proposed legislation affecting land resources. Include at least three statements that you can support with evidence in order to convey your reasons for your perspective concerning the proposed legislation.
2. Write a letter of appreciation when you feel a legislator has done a good job regarding land use legislation. Legislators are human too and seldom receive “thank you” letters of encouragement.
3. Allow students to send their essays to a legislator or agency person of their choice.

Computer Extensions

1. League of Conservation Voters. Homepage. 2002. 25 June 2002. <<http://www.lcv.org/>> Interesting information on legislation regarding the environment. “Score Cards” are given to legislators according to how they have voted on environmental issues. There is also a “Take Action” link for more information on how to make a difference regarding legislation you are interested in.
2. Michigan House of Representatives. Committees. 2002. 23 July 2002. <http://www.house.state.mi.us/Committee/committees_how.html> Designed as a kids’ page to describe how committees work and how to testify before a committee.
3. Michigan Land Use Institute. Homepage. Mar. 2002. 19 Mar. 2002. <<http://www.mlui.org/>> The Institute is very involved in land use issues and policies and will be able to offer thorough information and advice. The site contains the latest information on policies in the legislature and a collection of articles on Michigan land use problems and issues.
4. Michigan Legislature. Homepage. 2002. 25 June 2002. <<http://www.michiganlegislature.org/>> Offers complete information on the Michigan Legislature including bills, legislators, session schedules and more.
5. Michigan Senate Kids Page. How a Bill Becomes a Law. 2002. 23 July 2002. <<http://www.senate.state.mi.us/kidspage/Howabill1.htm>> Designed as a kids’ page with appropriate reading levels to describe how a bill becomes a law.

SOURCE

Lesson developed by Anne Williamson, curriculum consultant for *United Growth for Kent County*, a grant project of Michigan State University Extension.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Contacts:

- Bureau of Land Management
- Grand Valley Metro Council
- Local Land Conservancy
- Local or regional planning commission
- Michigan Farmland and Community Alliance
- Michigan Land Use Institute
- Michigan Legislature
- National CACE Newsletter, “Participatory Democracy” contact person: Don Alexander (604) 739-0624
- United Growth for Kent County

References and Teacher Resources:

- Calliou, Sharilyn. “Curriculum for Community Making.” National CACE Newsletter. April 1994. Pg. 3-6. (5703 Prospect Road, New Minas, Nova Scotia B4N 3K5, Canada)
- Lewis, Barbara A. The Kids Guide to Social Action. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 1991.
- Western Regional Environmental Education Council, Inc. Project WILD. “Wild Bill’s Fate,” Pg. 316-317. Western Regional Environmental Education Council, Inc., 1992.

Additional Lessons:

- Project WILD: “Know Your Legislation: What’s in it for Wildlife?” Pg. 318-321.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK REFERENCE

IA1, IC1, IC3, IIIA3, IIIC1, IIID, IIIE1, IVB, IVD, IVD2, IVE1, IVF1, VA1, VB1, VD1, VE1, VG, VIA1, VIB1, VIC1, VID1, VID2



Issue Investigation: A Land Use Legislative Bill

Name(s) _____

Directions: Use this worksheet to gather and organize information about a land use bill. Fill in the blanks and answer the questions as completely as possible.

Name and code number of legislative bill: _____

1. Who introduced (sponsored) the bill in the legislature?
2. When was the bill introduced in the legislature?
3. In which branch of the legislature was the bill introduced?

4. Is the bill an amendment? _____
If yes, what is the original name and number of the bill?

5. History: What legislative committee(s) has the bill been referred to?
6. Has the bill passed through the House or Senate? _____
Which one? _____ When? _____
7. Was the bill signed into law?

8. What is the reason the bill was introduced? (Use the back of this sheet if more room is needed.)

*Community building
is not
a spectator
sport.*

—Bruce Adams
