

WRITING A BILL

An Act to Amend the Storybook County Building Code

CIVICS

GOVERNMENT

LITERATURE

RESEARCH AND WRITING

AT A GLANCE

GRADES	9-12 (adaptable for younger students)
TIME	Four sessions, each 30 minutes long.
HANDOUTS	1. The Storybook County Building Code; 2. Storybook County Bill Template; 3. Seal of State Approval Checklist; 4. Sample Completed Section 2

THE STORY PROBLEM

Three Little Pigs built three houses. Two blew down. The Big Bad Wolf is a known hazard in the Deep Woods, yet Storybook County's Building Code says nothing about wind-resistant walls or wolf-resistant doors. Students will amend the code.

► THE PROCESS PRACTICED

Bill writing. Every bill at a YMCA Youth and Government conference amends or creates an actual law, follows a fixed format, and is checked for completeness before it may be heard. Students learn that format here by fixing the laws of Storybook County.

► CHARACTERS FOR CONSIDERATION (ALL PUBLIC DOMAIN):

1. **The Three Little Pigs** (homeowners; two are now homeless)
2. **The Big Bad Wolf** (the hazard the code must address, and a taxpayer)
3. **Humpty Dumpty** (a resident with a well known interest in wall safety)
4. **Hansel and Gretel** (the Witch's house is made of gingerbread; is it code compliant?)
5. **The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe** (occupancy limits)

► LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will be able to identify a problem in a community and connect it to an existing law.
- Students will be able to write a bill in the Youth and Government format: title, sponsors, enacting clause, purpose, definitions, provisions, justification, fiscal implications, environmental implications and effective date.
- Students will be able to show changes to existing law using underlines for additions and strikeouts for deletions.
- Students will be able to check a bill against the Seal of State Approval checklist.

► MATERIALS:

- Handout: "The Storybook County Building Code" (the existing law; see Supporting Document 1)
- Handout: "Storybook County Bill Template" (Supporting Document 2)
- Handout: "Seal of State Approval Checklist" (Supporting Document 3)

- Paper or shared digital document for drafting
- Whiteboard or projector

► PRE-PLANNING:

- **Group Formation:** Groups of 2-3 students. Each group becomes the sponsors of one bill.
- **Problem Selection:** Each group chooses one section of the Building Code to amend, or one new section to add. Encourage groups to pick different sections so the class ends with a varied bill book.
- **Optional Roles within the group:** Lead Sponsor (presents), Researcher (reads the code and the story), Drafter (writes the bill text).

SESSION 1 FROM STORY TO PROBLEM TO LAW

30 MINUTES

- 5** **Hook.** Read the ending of The Three Little Pigs aloud. Ask: whose fault was it that the straw house fell? The pig who built it, the wolf, or the county that let a straw house be built in wolf country? Explain that legislators turn exactly this kind of "someone should do something" moment into a bill.
- 10** **Read the Existing Law.** Distribute the Storybook County Building Code. Read it together. Point out that it has sections, definitions and gaps. Stress the first rule of Youth and Government bill writing: **you cannot move forward without the original law.** A bill changes a law; it does not float free.
- 10** **Problem Brainstorm.** On the board, list every problem a story character could have with this code (no wind-load rule, no definition of "dwelling," gingerbread is not a listed material, no occupancy limit for footwear). Each group picks one.
- 5** **Group Check.** Each group states its problem and the section of the code it will change in one sentence: "Section 3 should be amended to require..."

SESSION 2 DRAFTING THE BILL

30 MINUTES

- 5** **Walk the Template.** Distribute the Storybook County Bill Template. Read the enacting clause aloud: "The People of Storybook County, represented in the Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows." Explain each section in one line.
- 5** **The Marking Rule.** Show the two marks. Words being added to the law are **underlined**. Words being removed are **struck through** (draw a line through them). Then give the second rule: **if nothing is underlined or struck out, it is not a bill.**
- 15** **Draft.** Groups write the Purpose (one or two sentences), Section 1 Definitions (every new term underlined) and Section 2 Provisions (the actual change to the code, with underlines and strikeouts).
- 5** **Task Check.** Circulate. Ask each group to show one underline and one strikeout.

SESSION 3 JUSTIFICATION, MONEY AND TREES

30 MINUTES

- 5** **Why This Bill.** Explain Justification. It answers "why should the county do this?" with evidence. In Storybook County, evidence comes from the stories: how many houses fell, who was harmed, what the wolf said at the door.
- 10** **Write the Justification.** Groups write 3-5 sentences citing at least two specific events from their source story.

10

Fiscal and Environmental Implications. Explain that every bill must say what it costs and what it does to the environment, even if the answer is "none." Groups write both. Prompt questions: Who pays for brick? Does the county need a wall inspector? What happens to the straw?

5

Effective Date. Groups choose a date and explain why (immediately, next building season, "upon the Wolf's next visit").

SESSION 4 THE SEAL OF STATE APPROVAL

30 MINUTES

5

Explain the Seal. At the conference, the Comptroller's team reads every bill for format before it is heard. A bill that passes gets the Seal of State Approval. Format is not optional; a brilliant idea in the wrong format is sent back.

10

Peer Review. Groups swap bills and complete the Seal of State Approval Checklist on another group's bill. Reviewers mark each item as met or not met and write one sentence of help for each missed item.

10

Revise. Groups fix what the reviewers found.

5

Wrap-Up. Each group reads its bill title aloud ("An Act to Amend Section 3 of the Storybook County Building Code in relation to wind-resistant construction"). Collect the bills; they are the bill book for the Committee Hearing lesson.

► ASSESSMENT

Bill Format

40

Every template section present and in order; underlines and strikeouts used correctly; original law identified.

Purpose and Provisions

25

The change is clear, specific and actually changes the law.

Justification

20

At least two pieces of evidence from the source story; reasoning connects evidence to the change.

Fiscal and Environmental Implications

10

Both addressed with reasons.

Teamwork

5

All members contributed.

► DIFFERENTIATION

Support

Provide a partly completed bill with the Purpose written and blanks for the provisions. Allow groups to amend only one sentence of the code.

Challenge

Require a definitions section with three or more terms, or ask the group to amend two sections that must work together (a wall rule and an inspection rule).

THE STORYBOOK COUNTY BUILDING CODE (EXISTING LAW)

Section 1. Short Title. This chapter shall be known as the Storybook County Building Code.

Section 2. Definitions. "Structure" means any built thing with a roof. "Owner" means the person, animal or egg who lives in the structure.

Section 3. Permitted Materials. Structures may be built of stone, brick, wood, straw, sticks or any other material the owner finds convenient.

Section 4. Inspection. The county may inspect a structure if the owner invites the county to tea.

Section 5. Walls. Walls shall be of a height sufficient to sit upon.

Section 6. Occupancy. No limit.

Section 7. Penalties. Any wolf, giant or witch who damages a structure shall be asked to leave.

STORYBOOK COUNTY BILL TEMPLATE

Committee Assignment: _____

Chamber Assignment: Assembly / Senate

Bill Number: _____

Introduced By (Sponsors): _____

Title: An Act to amend Section _ of the Storybook County Building Code in relation to _____

The People of Storybook County, represented in the Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Purpose: (One or two sentences. What does this bill do and why?)

Summary of Provisions

Section 1. Definitions. (Every new term, fully underlined.)

Section 2. Provisions. (Copy the section of the code you are changing. Underline additions. Strike out deletions.)

Justification: (Why the county should pass this. Cite events from the story.)

Fiscal Implications: (What it costs, who pays, or why it costs nothing.)

Environmental Implications: (Effect on the Deep Woods, the river, the beanstalk, or none.)

Effective Date: (When the law takes effect.)

SEAL OF STATE APPROVAL CHECKLIST

Reviewer: _____ Bill Number:

- ☐ The original law is identified by section number.
- ☐ The Purpose is present and is one or two sentences.
- ☐ Section 1 Definitions is present and every new term is fully underlined.
- ☐ Section 2 Provisions shows the change with underlines and strikeouts.
- ☐ The Justification is present and cites the story.
- ☐ The Fiscal Implications are present.
- ☐ The Environmental Implications are present.
- ☐ The Effective Date is present.
- ☐ Title begins "An Act to..."
- ☐ Sponsors are listed.

Seal granted: Yes / Returned for correction (list items): _____

SAMPLE COMPLETED SECTION 2 (FOR THE TEACHER)

Section 3. Permitted Materials. Structures may be built of stone, brick, wood, ~~straw, sticks~~ or any other material the owner finds convenient material rated by the County Engineer to withstand a Category Two Huff and Puff. Straw and sticks may be used only for roofing above a brick or stone wall.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Storybook County Lesson Plans use public domain stories to practice real YMCA Youth and Government processes: bills, committees, debate, courts, elections, service, and proposals. Every lesson is three or four 30-minute sessions, and all of them live in one folder:

drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MleLDxVzKNq7QTWjw2EPFDqgMOaaJ2US. Part of the YMCA Youth and Government Educator Toolkit at nysyag.org. Questions: Drew Caldwell, dcaldwell@ymcanys.org.