

COMMITTEE HEARING AND BILL RANKING

CIVICS

GOVERNMENT

PUBLIC SPEAKING

CRITICAL THINKING

AT A GLANCE

GRADES	9-12 (adaptable for younger students)
TIME	Four sessions, each 30 minutes long. Works best after the Writing a Bill lesson, but the sample bills in the Supporting Documents let it stand alone.
HANDOUTS	1. Sample Bills for the Committee on Housing and Hazards; 2. Committee Chair Script; 3. Bill Ranking Rubric

THE STORY PROBLEM

The Storybook County Committee on Housing and Hazards has four bills on its calendar and only two can advance to the chamber. Which ones deserve it?

► THE PROCESS PRACTICED

The committee hearing. Before any bill reaches the chamber floor at a YMCA Youth and Government conference it is heard in committee, where the sponsors present, delegates ask technical questions, debate alternates con and pro, the sponsors sum up, and the committee ranks the bills. The top bills move on. Students learn the exact sequence and the Chair's script.

► LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will be able to run and participate in a committee hearing in the correct order: author's opening, technical questions, con and pro debate, author's summation, ranking.
- Students will be able to distinguish a technical question (asking what the bill does) from a debate point (arguing whether it should pass).
- Students will be able to use the recognition formula: thank the Chair, state name and delegation.
- Students will be able to score a bill with a rubric and explain the score.

► MATERIALS:

- Bills from the Writing a Bill lesson, or the four Sample Bills (Supporting Document 1)
- Handout: "Committee Chair Script" (Supporting Document 2)
- Handout: "Bill Ranking Rubric" (Supporting Document 3)
- Placards (index cards with the student's district name) for recognition
- A gavel or something to tap twice (a marker on a desk works)
- Timer

► PRE-PLANNING:

- **Assign Roles:**
 - **Committee Chair** (1 student): runs the hearing from the script, keeps time, recognizes speakers, rules on points of order.
 - **Clerk** (1 student): reads the enacting clause of each bill, keeps the speakers list, records the ranking.
 - **Sponsors** (2-3 students per bill): present the bill and answer questions.
 - **Committee Members** (everyone else): ask questions, debate, rank. Sponsors join the committee when their bill is not being heard but may not rank their own bill.
- Rotate the Chair and Clerk each session so several students practice presiding.

SESSION 1 HOW A HEARING WORKS

30 MINUTES

- 5** **Hook.** Ask: if Humpty Dumpty's family came to the Legislature asking for a wall law, who would hear them first? Explain that no bill goes straight to a vote of the whole chamber. Committees exist to hear a few bills carefully.
- 10** **The Five Parts.** Teach the hearing order using the Chair Script. Write it on the board: (1) Author's Opening, up to 4 minutes, with the remainder saved for closing; (2) Technical Questions, non-debatable; (3) Debate, alternating con and pro, starting and ending with a con speaker; (4) Author's Summation; (5) Ranking or Vote.
- 10** **Technical Question Drill.** Read Sample Bill A aloud. Students write one technical question (what the bill does: "Does Section 2 apply to walls already built?") and one debate point ("This bill punishes homeowners instead of wolves"). Call on several to read both; the class sorts each into the right pile.
- 5** **Recognition Formula.** Practice standing with the placard, waiting to be recognized, and saying "Thank you, Chair. [Name], [District]." Explain the no-yielding rule: a recognized speaker speaks for themselves and does not hand the floor to someone else.

SESSION 2 FULL HEARING, BILLS A AND B

30 MINUTES

- 3** **Call to Order.** The Chair opens using the script. The Clerk reads the enacting clause of Bill A.
- 12** **Hearing on Bill A.** Opening (3 minutes), technical questions (a "series" is three questions; 3 minutes), debate (two con, two pro, alternating, 1 minute each; 4 minutes), summation (1 minute), ranking sheets completed (1 minute).
- 12** **Hearing on Bill B.** Same sequence.
- 3** **Debrief.** What was hardest, keeping a question technical or keeping debate alternating? Rotate Chair and Clerk for next session.

SESSION 3 FULL HEARING, BILLS C AND D, PLUS POINTS OF ORDER

30 MINUTES

- 3** **Add Two Tools.** Teach Point of Order (the rules are being broken: "Point of order, Chair, that question is debate, not technical") and Point of Information (a factual question to the Chair about procedure). Note that in committee, "previous question" and "extend debate" are not in order; the Chair controls time.
- 12** **Hearing on Bill C..**

12

Hearing on Bill D..

3

Debrief. Did anyone use a point of order correctly? Did the Chair rule promptly?**SESSION 4 RANKING AND REPORTING OUT****30 MINUTES**

10

Tabulate. The Clerk collects the rubric sheets and totals each bill's score on the board while the Chair explains that sponsors' scores for their own bill are set aside.

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Discussion. Compare the ranking to the room's gut feeling. Was the best written bill the most popular? Which rubric line separated the top two? Explain that at the conference the top-ranked bills from each committee go to the chamber or a Joint Session and the rest wait for time to allow.

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Report Out. The Chair announces: "The Committee on Housing and Hazards reports Bills _ and _ favorably to the Assembly." Two gavel taps end the hearing.

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Wrap-Up. Each student writes one sentence: what would make my own bill rank higher?**► ASSESSMENT**

Chair and Clerk	Followed the script, kept the con and pro alternation, kept time, ruled on points of order, recorded the ranking accurately.
Sponsors	Clear opening, direct answers to technical questions, summation that responded to the con arguments.
Committee Members	Asked at least one technical question or gave one debate speech using the recognition formula; completed the rubric with reasons.
Participation and Decorum	Waited for recognition, no clapping after a bill fails, no referring to other bills by name during debate.

► DIFFERENTIATION**Support**

Give committee members question starters ("Does the bill define...", "Who enforces...", "What does Section 2 change..."). Shorten debate to one con and one pro.

Challenge

Ask the Chair to run the hearing without the script. Add a friendly amendment during Bill D and have the committee vote on it before ranking.

SAMPLE BILLS FOR THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND HAZARDS

Bill A. An Act to Amend the Storybook County Building Code in relation to wind-resistant construction. Sponsors: The Three Little Pigs. Requires all new dwellings in the Deep Woods to use brick or stone walls; straw and sticks limited to roofing. Fiscal: cost of brick borne by owners; county hires one Wall Inspector. Environmental: less straw harvesting.

Bill B. The Humpty Dumpty Wall Safety Act. Sponsors: Humpty Dumpty's household. Requires guardrails on any public wall over three feet; creates a Wall Safety Fund. Fiscal: funded by a one-cent tax on eggs. Environmental: none.

Bill C. An Act to Regulate Beanstalk Cultivation. Sponsors: residents of Beanstalk Hollow. Requires a permit before planting any seed that may exceed cloud height; makes the planter liable for anything that falls from above. Fiscal: permit fees fund a Falling Giant Response Team. Environmental: protects the Hollow's airspace.

Bill D. The Porridge Temperature Disclosure Act. Sponsors: the Three Bears. Requires any household leaving porridge unattended to post its temperature; creates a defense to burglary charges for anyone who enters only to test porridge. Fiscal: cost of thermometers. Environmental: none.

COMMITTEE CHAIR SCRIPT

"This hearing of the Committee on Housing and Hazards will come to order. Will the sponsors of Bill number _____ please approach the podium? Will the Clerk please read the enacting clause?"

(Clerk reads: "The People of Storybook County, represented in the Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows.")

"Sponsors, you have four minutes for your opening. You may reserve any remaining time for your summation."

"We are now in a period of technical questions. Technical questions ask what the bill does; they are not debate. Members wishing to ask a question, please raise your placard."

"We will now move to debate. Debate alternates con and pro and must begin and end with a con speaker. Speakers, thank the Chair and state your name and district when recognized. Is there a con speaker?"

"Sponsors, you have your remaining time for summation."

"Members, please complete your ranking sheets. Sponsors do not rank their own bill." (Two gavel taps.) "This concludes the hearing on Bill number _____."

Handling a Point of Order: "State your point." Then rule: "Your point is well taken" or "Your point is not well taken," and move on.

BILL RANKING RUBRIC (SCORE EACH LINE 1 TO 5; MAXIMUM 30)

- **How Well Written:** Format complete, changes clearly marked, language precise.
- **Justification and Implications:** Evidence from the story; fiscal and environmental sections thoughtful.
- **Author's Presentation and Knowledge:** Clear opening; answered technical questions accurately.
- **Importance to Storybook County:** Addresses a real and recurring problem.
- **Feasibility:** Could actually be carried out and enforced.
- **Debatability:** Produced real arguments on both sides.

Member name: _____ District: _____ Bill number: _____ Total: _____

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/1MieLDxVzKNq7QTwjw2EPFDqgMOaaJ2US. Part of the YMCA Youth and Government Educator Toolkit at nysyag.org. Questions: Drew Caldwell, dcaldwell@ymcanys.org.