

# FLOOR DEBATE AND PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

*The Humpty Dumpty Wall Safety Act*

CIVICS

GOVERNMENT

PUBLIC SPEAKING

DEBATE

## AT A GLANCE

|                 |                                                                                                 |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>GRADES</b>   | 9-12 (adaptable for younger students)                                                           |
| <b>TIME</b>     | Four sessions, each 30 minutes long.                                                            |
| <b>HANDOUTS</b> | 1. The Humpty Dumpty Wall Safety Act; 2. Parliamentary Procedure Cheat Sheet; 3. Amendment Form |

## ► THE PROCESS PRACTICED

Chamber debate under parliamentary procedure. Once a bill leaves committee it is debated by the full Assembly or Senate using a small set of motions and strict decorum. Students learn the motions, the amendment process and the vote by debating a bill everyone already understands: should Storybook County put a guardrail on the wall Humpty Dumpty fell from?

## ► LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will be able to follow the chamber sequence: enacting clause, author's opening, technical questions, alternating debate, summation, vote.
- Students will be able to make and respond to the chamber motions: point of order, point of information, point of personal privilege, motion to amend, motion to extend debate, previous question, and division.
- Students will be able to write and move an amendment using the Amendment Form.
- Students will be able to practice chamber decorum.

## ► MATERIALS:

- Handout: "The Humpty Dumpty Wall Safety Act" (Supporting Document 1)
- Handout: "Parliamentary Procedure Cheat Sheet" (Supporting Document 2)
- Handout: "Amendment Form" (Supporting Document 3)
- Placards, gavel, timer
- Role cards for the witness characters who will speak in debate (Humpty Dumpty's household, All the King's Horses and All the King's Men, the Wall Owner, a taxpayer from Nursery Rhyme Village, a representative of the Egg Producers)

## ► PRE-PLANNING:

- **Assign Roles:**

- **Speaker of the Assembly** (1 student): presides. See the Presiding Officer Training lesson for a fuller treatment; for this lesson the teacher may preside in Session 2 and hand the gavel to a student in Session 3.
- **Clerk** (1 student): reads the enacting clause, keeps the speakers list, counts votes.
- **Sergeant at Arms** (1 student): maintains decorum, collects amendment forms, carries them to the Clerk.
- **Sponsors** (2-3 students): present and defend the bill.
- **Assembly Members** (everyone else): each receives a district and a leaning (con, pro or undecided) so debate has two sides. Several also receive a character role card that gives them a story-based argument to make.

## SESSION 1 THE RULES OF THE ROOM

30 MINUTES

- 5 Hook.** Read the rhyme. Ask: after the fall, who should have done something? Explain that the chamber will now decide.
- 10 Cheat Sheet Walkthrough.** Teach the sequence and each motion with one example line. Emphasize the three things a recognized speaker may do: address the chamber, ask a series of questions through the Chair, or make one motion, which must be declared at the start ("I rise to make a motion").
- 10 Motion Drill.** The teacher reads short scenarios; students call out the right motion. "The room is too cold to think." (Point of personal privilege.) "The speaker is arguing during technical questions." (Point of order.) "We have heard enough; let's vote." (Previous question.) "I can't tell if the ayes won." (Division.) "What vote does an override need?" (Point of information.)
- 5 Decorum.** Post the rules: wait for recognition; no applause after a bill fails, controlled applause after a bill passes; do not name other members in debate; do not reference other bills; no props; no placard waving.

## SESSION 2 DEBATE, ROUND ONE

30 MINUTES

- 3 Call to Order.** Presiding officer opens; the Clerk reads the enacting clause; sponsors approach.
- 4 Author's Opening..**
- 5 Technical Questions.** One series of three.
- 14 Debate.** Alternating con and pro, one minute each, beginning with con. Character role cards are used here (All the King's Horses: "We spent an entire afternoon trying to put him together again; a guardrail costs less than our overtime").
- 4 Pause and Debrief.** Which motions were used? Were any used wrongly? Hold the bill over to the next session; the Chair announces "The Assembly stands in recess."

## SESSION 3 AMENDMENTS AND THE VOTE

30 MINUTES

- 5 The Amendment Form.** Teach the two kinds: friendly (the sponsors accept it; no vote needed) and unfriendly (the chamber votes). Amendments add or delete specific words in a specific section. Limit: two per bill.

10

**Draft and Move.** In pairs, members draft an amendment (lower the wall height from three feet to two; replace the egg tax with a fee on wall owners; exempt castle walls). The Sergeant at Arms collects forms. The Chair selects two, reads each, asks the sponsors whether it is friendly, and if not, allows one con and one pro speech and a vote.

8

**Closing Debate and Previous Question.** One more con and pro. A member moves the previous question; the Chair explains it needs a two-thirds vote after the first round of debate; the chamber votes on ending debate.

5

**Summation and Final Vote.** Sponsors sum up. Vote by placard and voice. If close, a member calls for division and the Clerk counts a standing vote. The Chair announces the result and taps the gavel twice. "This bill is passed and will be sent to the Governor" or "This bill is defeated."

2

**Decorum Check.** Spirit fingers if it passed. Silence if it failed.

## SESSION 4 SECOND BILL, STUDENT-RUN

30 MINUTES

25

**Full Run.** Repeat the sequence on a second bill (one from the Committee Hearing lesson, or Sample Bill C, the beanstalk bill) with a student presiding and no teacher prompts. Compress each stage: opening 2 minutes, questions 3, debate 10, amendments 5, summation and vote 5.

5

**Wrap-Up.** Students write the one motion they now feel confident making and the one they still find confusing.

### ► ASSESSMENT

|                                    |                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Members</b>                     | Used the recognition formula; made at least one on-topic debate speech or correct motion; followed decorum.         |
| <b>Sponsors</b>                    | Opening stated the problem and the fix; handled technical questions; summation answered the strongest con argument. |
| <b>Presiding Officer and Clerk</b> | Kept the sequence; ruled on points; counted accurately; announced results with the proper gavel taps.               |
| <b>Amendments</b>                  | Specific, properly formed, correctly moved and disposed of.                                                         |

### ► DIFFERENTIATION

#### Support

Give every member a speech starter card with a one-sentence argument matching their leaning. Allow the teacher to preside throughout.

#### Challenge

Remove the leaning assignments and let members choose sides after hearing the opening. Require every speaker to respond to the previous speaker's point before making their own.

# THE HUMPTY DUMPTY WALL SAFETY ACT

**Bill Number:** A-2 **Chamber:** Assembly **Introduced By:** The Humpty Dumpty Household, Nursery Rhyme Village

**Title:** An Act to amend Section 5 of the Storybook County Building Code in relation to wall safety.

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

**Purpose:** To prevent great falls from public walls by requiring guardrails and creating a Wall Safety Fund.

**Section 1. Definitions.** "Public wall" means any wall on county property that a person, animal or egg can sit upon. "Guardrail" means a barrier at least eighteen inches high along the top of a public wall.

**Section 2. Provisions.** Section 5 is amended to read: Walls shall be of a height sufficient to sit upon. Any public wall over three feet in height shall have a guardrail. A Wall Safety Fund is created, financed by a tax of one cent per dozen eggs sold in the county, to pay for guardrails and for the services of All the King's Horses and All the King's Men.

**Justification:** A resident of Nursery Rhyme Village suffered a great fall from a public wall. All the King's Horses and All the King's Men could not put him together again. The county has no wall safety rule.

**Fiscal Implications:** Egg tax estimated to raise enough for twelve guardrails per year.

**Environmental Implications:** None.

**Effective Date:** The first day of spring.

# PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE CHEAT SHEET

**Order of business for a bill:** Clerk reads enacting clause; author's opening (reserve time for summation); technical questions (non-debatable; a series is two in the chamber); debate alternating con and pro, starting and ending con; amendments; summation; vote.

**When recognized:** "Thank you, Speaker. [Name], [District]." You may (a) address the chamber, (b) ask a series of questions through the Chair, or (c) make one motion, declared at the start. You may not yield your time to another member.

## Motions and points

- **Point of Order:** The rules are being broken. Interrupts. The Chair rules.
- **Point of Information:** A question about procedure or the bill's status, asked to the Chair. Not debate.
- **Point of Personal Privilege:** Comfort or safety of the chamber (cannot hear, too cold, need a moment). Not for arguing.
- **Motion to Amend:** Submitted on the Amendment Form. Friendly amendments are accepted by the sponsors; unfriendly amendments get one con, one pro and a majority vote. Two per bill.
- **Motion to Extend Debate:** Adds speakers. Majority vote.
- **Previous Question:** End debate and vote now. Needs two-thirds, and only after at least one full round of debate.
- **Division:** Demand a standing count when the voice vote is unclear. No vote needed; the Chair orders the count.

**Votes:** Passage by simple majority, by placard and voice. The Clerk breaks ties. Two gavel taps end consideration of a bill. Veto override needs two-thirds (see the Governor's Cabinet lesson).

**Decorum:** No applause for a defeated bill; controlled applause or spirit fingers for a passed bill. Do not name members. Do not reference other bills. No props. No placard waving. Argue the bill, not the person.

# AMENDMENT FORM

Bill Number: \_\_\_ Section to be amended:

Moved by: \_\_\_\_\_ District: \_\_\_\_\_

**Type:** Friendly / Unfriendly (circle) **Change:** Add words / Delete words / Replace words (circle)

Exact text to delete: \_\_\_\_\_

Exact text to insert: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason (one sentence): \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsors accept as friendly: Yes / No Chamber vote: Adopted / Failed

## 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](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MIeLDxVzKNq7QTWjw2EPFDqgMOaaJ2US). Part of the YMCA Youth and Government Educator Toolkit at [nysyag.org](http://nysyag.org). Questions: Drew Caldwell, [dcaldwell@ymcanys.org](mailto:dcaldwell@ymcanys.org).