

PRESIDING OFFICER TRAINING

Running the Chamber

CIVICS

GOVERNMENT

LEADERSHIP

PUBLIC SPEAKING

AT A GLANCE

GRADES	9-12 (adaptable for younger students)
TIME	Four sessions, each 30 minutes long.
HANDOUTS	1. Presiding Officer Script and Gavel Signals; 2. Mini-Bill Cards; 3. Clerk's Journal Page; 4. Curveball Cards

THE STORY PROBLEM

The Storybook County Assembly has a long calendar of very short bills. Each needs a Presiding Officer who can get it heard fairly in five minutes.

► THE PROCESS PRACTICED

Presiding. YMCA Youth and Government chambers and committees are run entirely by students: Speakers, Senate Presidents, Committee Chairs, Clerks and Sergeants at Arms. Presiding Officers train for months on the script, gavel signals, recognition, time keeping and rulings. In this lesson every student presides over at least one short "mini-bill" so the class learns that leading a room is a skill, not a personality.

► LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will be able to open, run and close consideration of a bill from the Presiding Officer script.
- Students will be able to use gavel signals and time signals.
- Students will be able to recognize speakers fairly and alternate con and pro.
- Students will be able to rule on points of order and personal privilege calmly and move on.
- Students will be able to perform the Clerk and Sergeant at Arms duties that support the chair.

► MATERIALS:

- Handout: "Presiding Officer Script and Gavel Signals" (Supporting Document 1)
- Handout: "Mini-Bill Cards" (Supporting Document 2), one card per student
- Handout: "Clerk's Journal page" (Supporting Document 3)
- Handout: "Curveball Cards" (Supporting Document 4) for the teacher
- Gavel, timer, placards

► PRE-PLANNING:

- Every student will preside once. Make a rotation list so each student also serves once as Clerk and once as Sergeant at Arms.
- Mini-bills are one sentence long so the room can hear six to eight of them in a session.

SESSION 1 WHAT THE CHAIR ACTUALLY DOES

30 MINUTES

- 5** **Hook.** Have the Queen of Hearts "preside" for one minute (the teacher, shouting "Off with their heads" at anyone who speaks without permission, recognizing only her friends, calling the vote before debate). Ask what went wrong. List the opposite on the board: fair recognition, predictable order, calm rulings, clear results.
- 10** **The Script.** Read the Presiding Officer Script aloud, taking turns one line at a time. Teach the three gavel moments: one tap to call to order or to signal 30 seconds remaining, two taps at 15 seconds remaining and at the end of a bill, and the phrase "The chamber will come to order" instead of pounding.
- 10** **The Supporting Roles.** Teach the Clerk (reads the enacting clause, keeps the speakers list by district, records the vote in the Journal) and the Sergeant at Arms (watches decorum, collects amendment forms, counts a division with the Clerk). Demonstrate with one mini-bill, teacher presiding.
- 5** **Assign the Rotation.** Post the order for Sessions 2 and 3.

SESSION 2 EVERYONE PRESIDES, ROUND ONE

30 MINUTES

- 2** **Setup.** First PO, Clerk and Sergeant take their places.
- 26** **Mini-Bills.** Each PO runs one mini-bill in about four minutes: call to order, Clerk reads enacting clause, sponsor opening (30 seconds), two technical questions, one con and one pro (30 seconds each), summation (20 seconds), vote, announcement, two taps. The next PO steps up without a break. The teacher holds up a Curveball Card once per PO (a point of personal privilege, a member who starts clapping, a second con speaker trying to go when a pro is due).
- 2** **Quick Debrief.** Each PO names one thing that went well.

SESSION 3 EVERYONE PRESIDES, ROUND TWO, HARDER

30 MINUTES

- 26** **Mini-Bills with More Curveballs.** Remaining students preside. Curveballs escalate: a point of order that is wrong, a tie vote (the Clerk breaks it), a member who tries to yield time, a call for division, a friendly amendment.
- 4** **Debrief.** What is the hardest thing about staying neutral when you have an opinion on the bill?

SESSION 4 PRESIDING AT LENGTH

30 MINUTES

- 20** **Full Bill.** Two students, selected by the class or by ranked choice vote, preside over a full bill from the Floor Debate lesson, splitting the bill at the start of amendments so both get a long stretch in the chair. A third student serves as Deputy Speaker, seated beside the chair to keep the speakers list and whisper the next line if needed, which is how real conference deputies help.
- 5** **Feedback Circle.** The class gives each PO one specific compliment and one specific suggestion using the rubric language.
- 5** **Wrap-Up.** Explain that at the conference the Speaker and Senate President are elected and the second-place finisher becomes Deputy. Ask students who would like to run in the Elections lesson.

► ASSESSMENT

Script and Sequence Followed the order; used the right words; did not skip stages.	30
Fairness Alternated con and pro; recognized by placard order; did not favor friends.	25
Rulings Responded to each curveball with a decision and moved on.	20
Time and Gavel Signals at 30 and 15 seconds; two taps at the end; stayed within the bill's time.	15
Clerk and Sergeant Duties Enacting clause read; journal accurate; division counted correctly; decorum enforced quietly.	10

► DIFFERENTIATION

Support

Allow the PO to read directly from the script card for the whole bill. Pair a nervous PO with a Deputy from the start.

Challenge

Require the PO to run a bill with no script in hand, or to handle a disputed point of order by explaining the rule in their own words.

PRESIDING OFFICER SCRIPT AND GAVEL SIGNALS

Opening: (one tap) "The Storybook County Assembly will come to order. Will the sponsors of Bill number _____ please approach the podium? Will the Clerk please read the enacting clause?"

Author's time: "Sponsors, you have _____ minutes for your opening. You may reserve time for summation."

Technical questions: "We are in a period of technical questions. Members, please raise your placards. [District], you are recognized for a series."

Debate: "We now move to debate, beginning with a con speaker. Is there a con speaker?" (Recognize.) "Is there a pro speaker?" Continue alternating. "We will end on a con speaker."

Point raised: "State your point." Then: "Your point is well taken; [correction]." or "Your point is not well taken; debate will continue."

Amendments: "The Sergeant at Arms will collect amendment forms. The Clerk will read the amendment. Sponsors, do you accept this amendment as friendly?"

Summation: "Sponsors, you have _____ remaining for summation."

Vote: "All those in favor of Bill _____, raise your placards and say aye. All those opposed, raise your placards and say nay. In the opinion of the Chair the ayes/nays have it." If division is called: "A division has been called. All in favor please stand to be counted."

Result: (two taps) "Bill _ is passed and will be sent to the Governor." or "Bill _ is defeated." Then: "Will the sponsors of the next bill please approach the podium?"

Recess: "The Assembly stands in recess until _____."

Gavel signals: One tap: come to order, or 30 seconds remaining for a speaker. Two taps: 15 seconds remaining, and the end of consideration of a bill. Never pound repeatedly; say "The chamber will come to order."

MINI-BILL CARDS (ONE SENTENCE EACH; SPONSOR READS IT AS THE WHOLE BILL)

- An Act requiring every bridge troll to post its riddle in advance. (Three Billy Goats Gruff)
- An Act banning the sale of magic beans to minors. (Jack and the Beanstalk)
- An Act requiring porridge to be served at a single, moderate temperature. (Three Bears)
- An Act creating a Sleepy Hollow Twenty-Year Nap Registry so families can find missing nappers. (Rip Van Winkle)
- An Act requiring all woodcutters to carry a license. (Hansel and Gretel; Little Red Riding Hood)
- An Act limiting unbirthday parties to one per week. (Alice in Wonderland)
- An Act requiring motorcars on the Riverbank to be registered to a responsible adult. (The Wind in the Willows)
- An Act requiring shepherds to count sheep twice before reporting them lost. (Little Bo Peep)
- An Act requiring the cupboard of every household to hold at least one bone. (Old Mother Hubbard)
- An Act fining anyone who cries wolf without a wolf. (Aesop)
- An Act requiring pied pipers to register with the Department of Pest Control. (The Pied Piper of Hamelin)
- An Act requiring all emperors to have their clothing inspected before parades. (The Emperor's New Clothes)
- An Act making the first day of spring a county holiday for tortoises. (Aesop)
- An Act requiring all glass slippers to be sold in pairs. (Cinderella)
- An Act requiring cats to wear bells within fifty feet of a mouse hole. (Aesop)
- An Act limiting Christmas Eve ghost visits to one per household. (A Christmas Carol)

CLERK'S JOURNAL PAGE

Date: _____ Chamber: Assembly / Senate Presiding Officer: _____

Bill number and title: _____

Sponsors: _____ Technical question series:

Con speakers (district): _____ Pro speakers (district): _____

Amendments: ___ (friendly / voted) Points raised: _____

Vote: Ayes ___ Nays ___ Division called: Y / N Result: Passed / Defeated

CURVEBALL CARDS (TEACHER READS OR HANDS TO A MEMBER TO PERFORM)

- Rise on a point of personal privilege: "I cannot hear the sponsor."
- Start clapping loudly when a bill is defeated.
- Try to speak pro when the Chair has called for a con speaker.
- Say "I yield my remaining time to the member from Wonderland."
- Rise on a point of order that is wrong: "The sponsor cannot speak twice." (They can; summation is theirs.)
- Call for division after a lopsided vote.
- Ask a debate question disguised as a technical question: "Doesn't the sponsor agree this bill is unfair?"
- Produce a prop (a stuffed wolf) during debate.
- Vote both aye and nay.
- Submit a friendly amendment that changes one word.

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](mailto:dcaldwell@ymcanys.org).