



Local Government

Uses Vote Worthy Part 2 (Podcast 4), the question from Soreyda Bedit-Begley (at about 43:27) [Listen](#)

Background Reading

Elections for national and state officials sometimes overshadow the importance of local elections — elections at the county or city level. But in many ways local elections have a more immediate on the daily lives of citizens than national and state elections. In Kentucky, these county officials are elected:

- county judge/executive
- justice of the peace (commonly called magistrate)
- county attorney
- county clerk
- property valuation administrator (Ky. Const., sec. 99)
- sheriff
- jailer
- coroner
- constable
- county surveyor

Kentucky's Legislative Research Commission (LRC) website has an informational bulletin, [“Duties of Elected County Officials,”](#) which summarizes the duties of each official in county governments in Kentucky.

(<https://legislature.ky.gov/LRC/Publications/Informational%20Bulletins/ib114.pdf>) A chapter on each office sets out its most important duties, as well as its powers, qualifications, compensation, and historical background.

Cities also have elected officials such as mayors and city council members, and some cities and counties have merged governments. The LRC informational bulletin "[Kentucky Municipal Statutory Law](#)" explains the Kentucky laws about municipal and urban-county governments and provides examples of organizational plans.

(<https://legislature.ky.gov/LRC/Publications/Informational%20Bulletins/ib145.pdf>)

Another local election is that of school board members. Elections of school board members have a direct impact on the learning experience of students in the school district the board oversees. The [Kentucky School Boards Association website](#) has information about the responsibilities of school board members. (<https://www.ksba.org/BeingaBoardMember.aspx>)

By learning more about the elections and elected officials in your own county, school district, and community, you become an informed citizen who can discuss issues that impact you directly.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you know about the structure of your local government? How could you find out more?
2. Can you identify any locally elected officials? Who are they and what are their roles? What are their duties and responsibilities? How could you find out more?
3. What do you know about your local school board? Who are the members? What are the responsibilities of the school board? How could you find out more?
4. Have you ever attended a school board meeting or meeting of the city council? What is the benefit of attending meetings like this?
5. Do you think you would be interested in running for a local office? Why or why not?

Key Vocabulary

municipality: a city or town that has corporate status and local government.

urban-county government: one unified jurisdiction that includes one or more cities and their surrounding county

Teaching Tips

- In the Vote Worthy podcast Joshua A. Douglas and Renee Shaw emphasize the importance of local elections. Understanding the functions of county or municipal governments and the roles played by elected officials helps engage students in the political process. The resources cited in the Background Reading are an attempt to simplify local government structures in Kentucky, but they are lengthy documents with multiple layers. If you decide to focus on either of these entities, you might want to have students focus on just the structure of local government and one to three of the positions of elected officials. You could also divide the class into small groups and ask each group to focus on one position and prepare a report for the class on what they have learned. You might also opt to focus on the local school board, which is much less complicated.
- Internet research will help students get started, but a personal experience is much more impactful. Try to arrange an in-person or ZOOM interview with a local official as outlined in Activity Two.
- Whatever your focus, keep in mind that some of the students in the class might have family members who are elected officials. Others may have heard parents or other people make unflattering remarks about local officials or school board members. You could ask students to identify who currently holds each position, but keeping the focus on the structures of local governments and the roles of each elected official instead of focusing on individual officials or board members will lessen the likelihood of conflict. Still, it is always worth refreshing students' memories about the process of civil discourse. Consider using these educational resources from the website of the United States Courts:
 - [Civility Self-Reflection Exercise - Civil Discourse and Difficult Decisions](https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/educational-activities/civil-discourse-and-difficult) | United States Courts (<https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/educational-activities/civil-discourse-and-difficult>)
 - [Setting Ground Rules - Civil Discourse and Difficult Decisions](https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/setting-ground-rules-civil-discourse-and-difficult) | United States Courts (<https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/setting-ground-rules-civil-discourse-and-difficult>)

Suggested Activities

Activity One

After listening to the podcast question, sharing the Background Reading, and using one or more of the discussion questions, tell students that you are going to collaborate to create a wall chart with information about local government including the structure of the government and information about various elected positions. You could use chart paper, poster board, or another material. Determine what will be included in the wall chart and who will be responsible

for each section. Develop criteria for what each segment must include. You might decide on a common format or allow individuals/small groups to be creative in their design, but there should be a common understanding of what information must be included.

You might want to have students use sketch noting as they brainstorm and refine their ideas. The flexibility of sketch noting allows students to see connections as they work rather than trying to impose connections at the outset. It engages students who are visual or spatial thinkers as well as those who are stronger in verbal thinking. It also provides ideas for how to use format their section of the wall chart. You can use sketch note templates or blank sheets. Encourage students to use a combination of words, phrases, creative lettering, images, visual elements like arrows and boxes, and color. (Find more information about Sketch Noting at the [Verbal to Visual](https://www.verbaltovisual.com) website. (<https://www.verbaltovisual.com>))

Activity Two

Arrange for a classroom interview with an elected official, either in-person or remotely. Remind students of proper interview techniques and note taking and lead them in practice sessions. Discuss the tone you want to set for your interview – inquisitive but not adversarial.

Lead students in doing background research so that they are not asking superficial questions that they could answer with minimal research. As a class, determine your overall focus and brainstorm ideas for topics. Rather than having each student ask an individual question, divide the class into small groups and allow each group to decide on the roles each member of the group will play. It helps to have one student in each group ask the question while others take notes. This allows the interviewer to maintain eye contact and demonstrate attentiveness. You might have one person in each group in charge of coming up with a follow-up question based on what the interviewee says.

Remind students that good interview questions cannot be answered “yes” or “no” and are not multiple choice. Phrasing like “could you tell me about...” or “I’ve always wondered about...” allow the interviewee more range in their response. Remind students to thank the interviewee.

Each student should take notes on all the responses from the interviewee, not just during their segment of the interview. (Sketch noting is also an excellent tool for note taking.)

Sometimes an interviewee will answer a question you have not asked yet in response to another question. Students need to be alert for this and have alternate questions prepared so that they do not ask repeat questions.

After the interview, have students work individually or in their groups to write articles based on the interview. Compare the articles that are written. How many different perspectives are there? Are there any factual discrepancies?

A variation might be to interview candidates running in local elections. In this case, the focus might be on their platforms as candidates rather than on their experience in office. Remind

students that this type of interview is about providing candidates with the opportunity to share their perspective, not for the students to express their opinions.

Activity Three

As a class, create a public education campaign to inform classmates or the public about local governments and local elections. Begin by discussing possible topics and formats. Different groups of students might develop materials in different formats, such as a series of articles for the local newspaper, a series of short podcasts, or videos for YouTube.

Kentucky Academic Standards

Social Studies

HS.C.KGO.3

Describe how active citizens can affect change in their communities and Kentucky.

HS.C.I.CC.1

Engage in civil discussion, reach consensus when appropriate and respect diverse opinions relevant to compelling and/or supporting questions in civics.

HS.C.I.CC.2

Engage in disciplinary thinking and construct arguments, explanations or public communications relevant to meaningful and/or investigative questions in civics.

HS.C.I.CC.3

Engage in disciplinary thinking and apply appropriate evidence to propose a solution or design an action plan relevant to compelling and/or supportive questions in civics.

Reading and Writing Literacy Practices

- Recognize that text is anything that communicates a message.
- Employ, develop and refine schema to understand and create text.
- Utilize receptive and expressive language arts to better understand self, others and the world.
- Engage in specialized, discipline-specific literacy practices.
- Apply high level cognitive processes to think deeply and critically about text.

Reading and Composing Guiding Principles

- Students will integrate and evaluate content presented in print/non-print forms of text found in diverse media and formats.
- Students will compose informative and explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.
- Students will use a variety of strategies to determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases, consulting reference material when appropriate.
- Students will acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking and listening to be transition ready.

Resource created by Judy Sizemore, education consultant