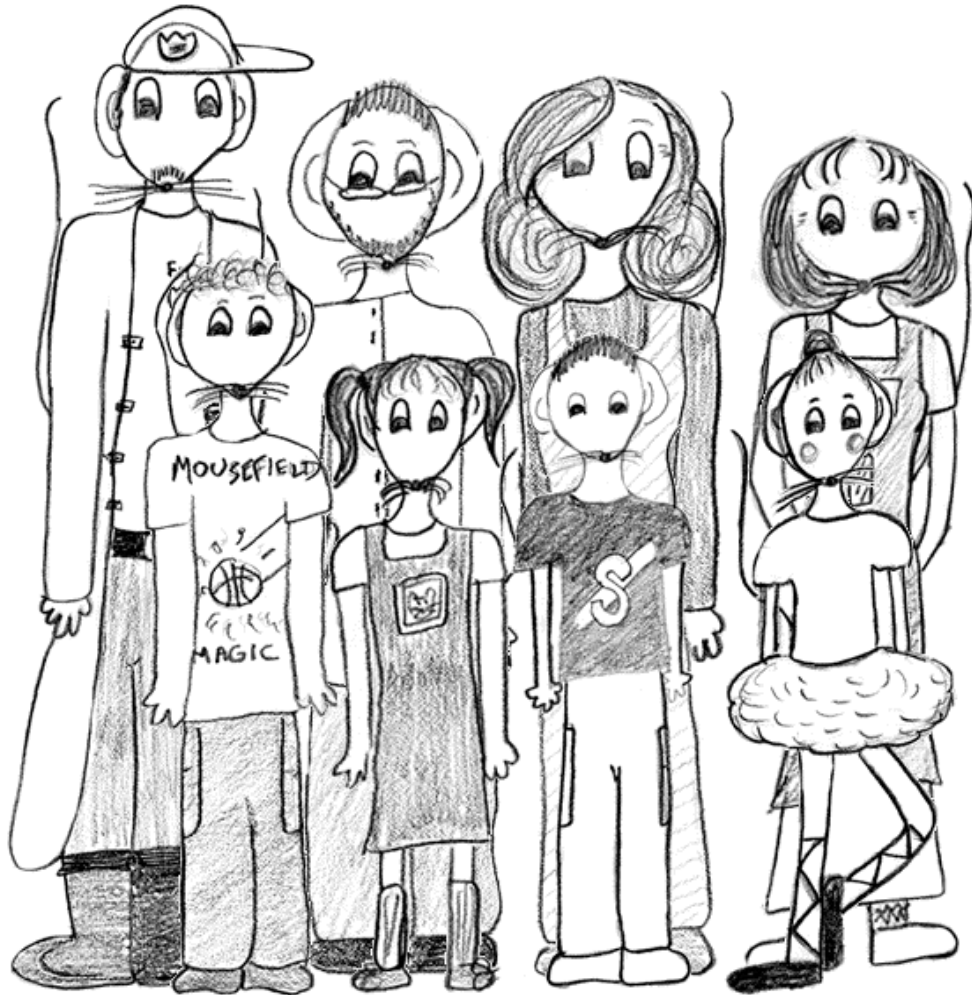


Town Mouse and Country Mouse Go To Town Meeting



A Short Booklet On Vermont Town Meeting

By Deborah L. Markowitz
Secretary of State
Illustrated by Aviva Markowitz

2003

Town Mouse and Country Mouse

Go To Town Meeting

I hope you enjoy the **Town Mouse and Country Mouse Go To Town Meeting**. This short booklet was designed to teach students grades 3-5 about Vermont's Town Meeting Day, its history and how it works today.

In addition to the text we have included some fun puzzles to help teachers assess student learning. In the teacher's guide we provide discussion questions and classroom activities to supplement the reading materials and help children learn the value of participatory democracy and experience the concepts addressed in the Booklet.

Town Mouse and Country Mouse Go To Town Meeting is a joint project of the Office of the Secretary of State and Kids Voting Vermont with support from the Vermont Institute for Government and the Center for Civics Education.

For more information about our **Town Mouse and Country Mouse Go To Town Meeting** or to order copies please call my office at 802-828-2148.

Deborah Markowitz
Secretary of State
September 2003

For Additional Copies Or For More Information Contact:

Office of the Secretary of State, 26 Terrace Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05609-1101
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Town Mouse and Country Mouse Go To Town Meeting

A Short Booklet on Vermont Town Meeting

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**These materials and activities are aligned with
Vermont's Framework of Standards:**

Grades PreK-4

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History and Social Sciences Standards: 6.9, 6.10, 6.11, 6.12, 6.13
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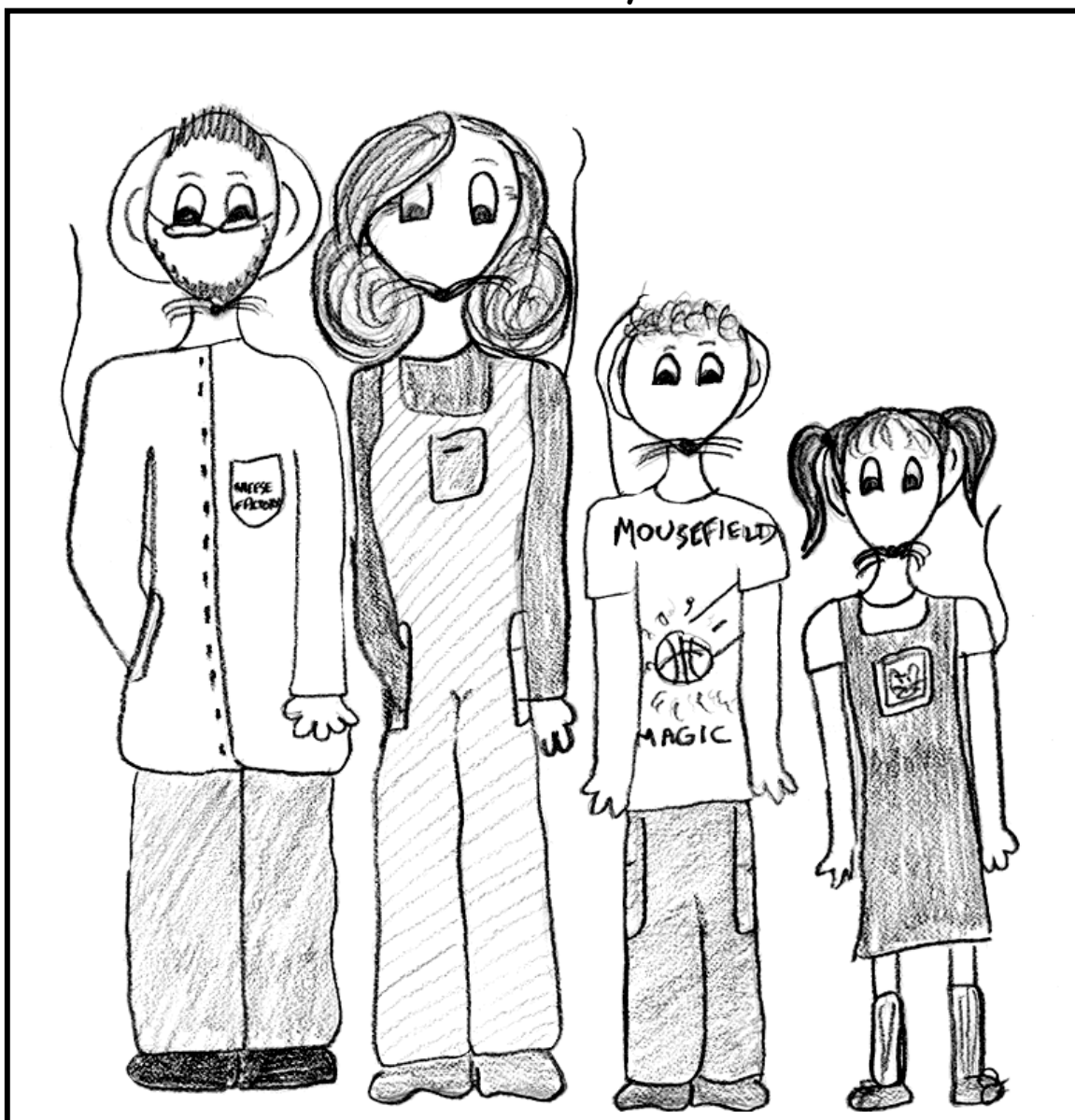
Grades 5– 8

Communication and Language Arts : 1.3, 1.8, 1.11, 2.1, 2.2

Personal Development: 3.7 and 3.9

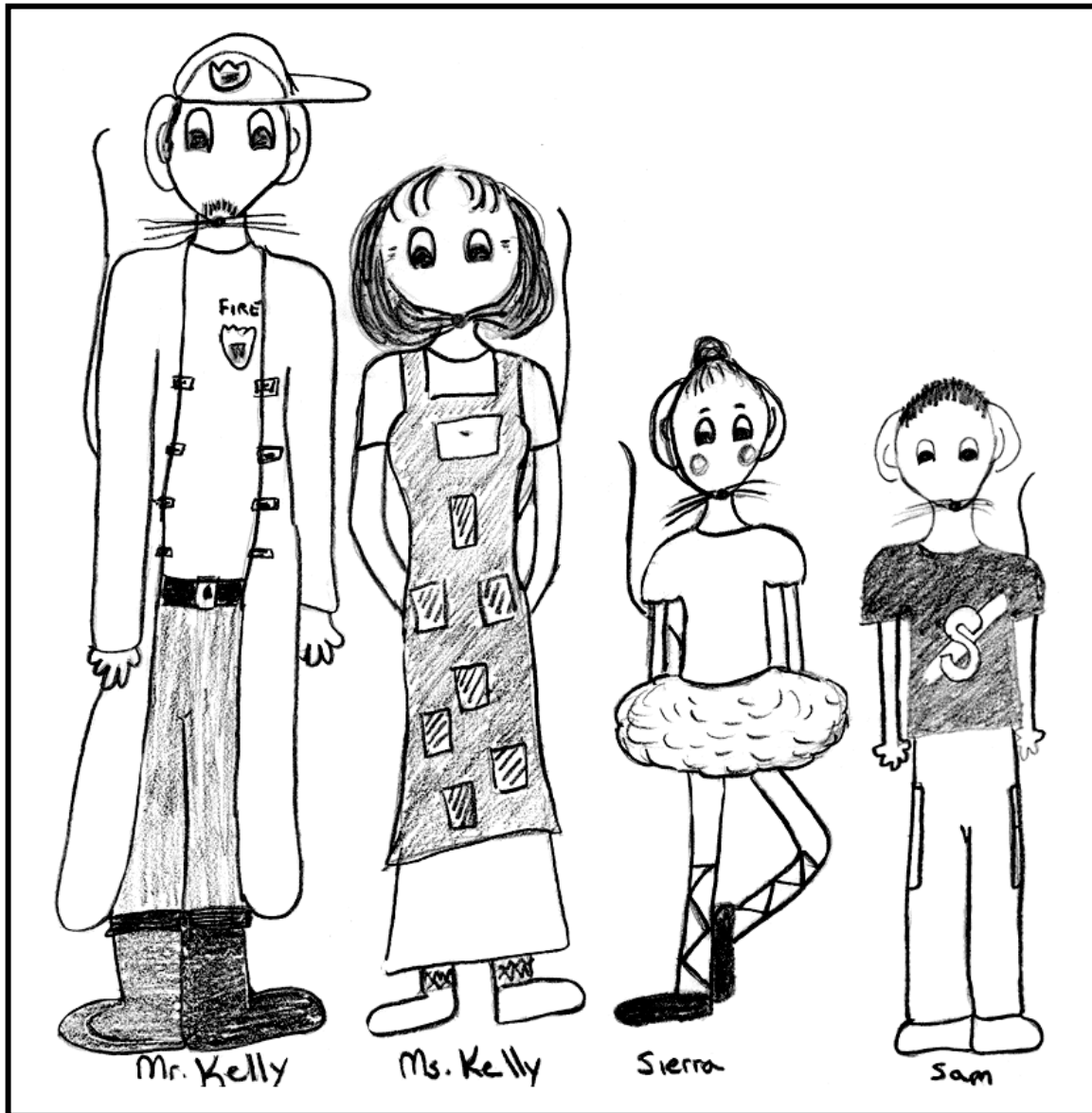
History and Social Studies: 6.9, 6.10, 6.11, 6.12, 6.13, 6.14, 6.17

The Country Mice



This is the McKinley family. Mr. McKinley works at the cheese factory. Ms. McKinley is a school librarian. They live in Mousefield, Vermont. Every year on town meeting day the McKinley family goes to the Mousefield town meeting that is held in the elementary school cafeteria. Town Meeting day always falls during the mid-winter school break so even the kids can come along!

The Town Mice



This is the Kelly family. Mr. Kelly works for the city as a firefighter. Ms. Kelly works at a flower store. They live in Mouselington, Vermont. Every year on town meeting day Ms. Kelly picks Mr. Kelly up from work so that they can vote before they go home to have dinner. The kids like to come along to watch.

What is Town Meeting Day?

Vermont's Town Meeting Day is the first Tuesday of every March. On this day most Vermont cities and towns hold their annual town and school meetings.

On Town Meeting Day in some towns people gather together at the town hall or local school to discuss and then vote on issues. This is called voting at a "**floor meeting.**"

In Vermont's cities and in many of our larger towns people go to the polling place to vote. This is called voting by "**Australian ballot.**" Many towns vote some issues on the floor and others by Australian ballot.

Australian Ballot Voting was adopted in Vermont in 1892. It was the system of voting that was being used at that time in Australia!



On Town Meeting Day the voters decide how much money people who own land in the town will pay in taxes.

The tax money is used to pay for teachers, school busses, library books, and other things for the school. It is also used to pay people to repair the town roads, to work in the town office and to buy equipment such as snowplows and fire trucks.

The voters at town meeting elect the people who run the town. People elected at town meeting include:

The Selectboard - A small group of people who run the town. (In cities voters elect a city council and mayor instead.)

The Schoolboard - A small group of people who make important decisions about the schools.

The Town Clerk—Keeps the records of the town and runs the elections.

The Treasurer—Pays the bills and keeps track of the town and school district's money.



Town Meeting Holiday

Vermont law makes Town Meeting Day a holiday for people who work for the state government. Other business owners can choose to give their workers the day off to go to town meeting, but many do not. For this reason, a law was passed to let towns hold their town meeting on the weekend or at night before Town Meeting Day.



Most towns have kept their town meeting on the first Tuesday in March.

History of Town Meeting

Vermont's settlers held town meetings even before Vermont was a state. The first town meeting was in Bennington in 1762, fifteen years before Vermont was created.

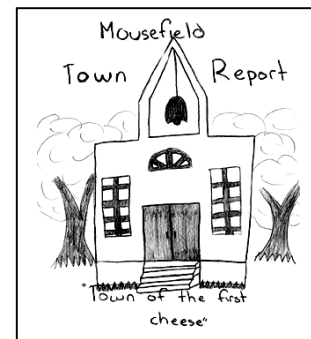
Town meeting was important because it helped new settlers meet their neighbors. This strengthened the town and allowed people to work together to solve town problems.

In the olden days, voters would talk about different things than they do at today's town meeting. For example, in the 1700's the voters would decide whether farmers could let their pigs run free and they would decide how much firewood each person would have to contribute to help heat the town and school.

Getting Started

Towns must advertise their town meeting. This advertisement is called a "**Warning**". The warning tells voters when and where town meeting will be held, and it lists what will be voted on (the "**articles**.")

The articles and warning are also printed in the **Town Report**. The town report is a small booklet that tells voters what has been going on in the town for the past year.



Town Meeting Day With The Country Mice

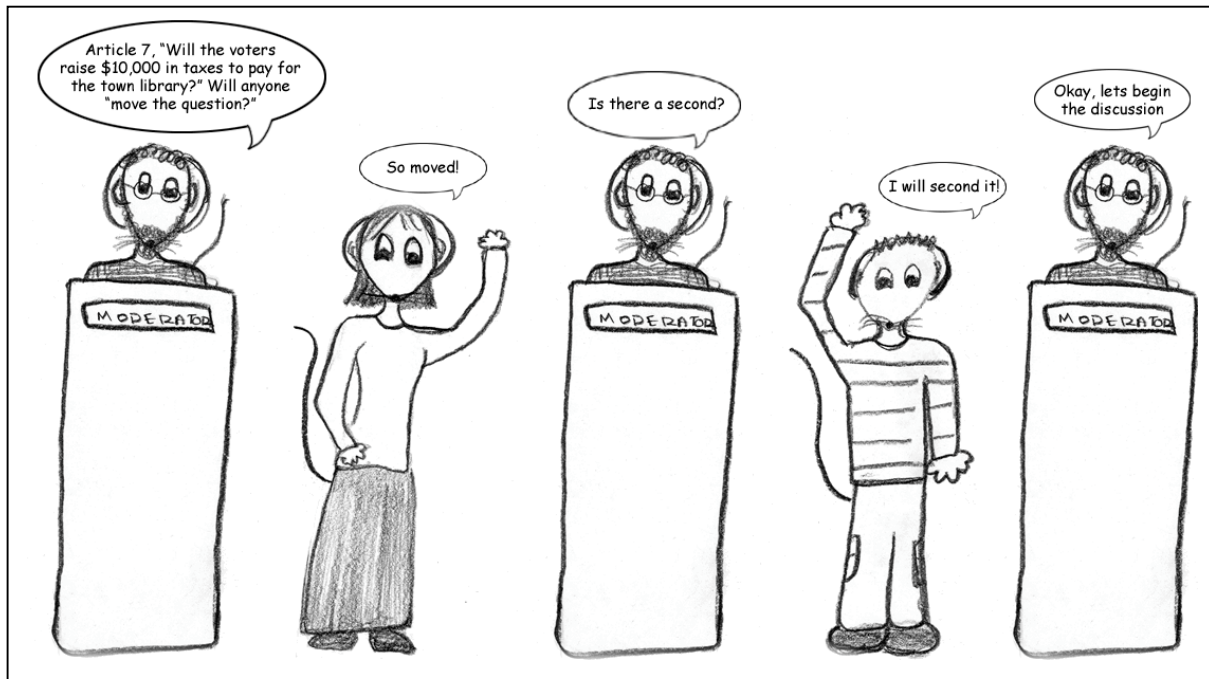


On Town Meeting Day the McKinley family get to the Mousefield town meeting early to get good seats. It is sometimes hard for Jessica and Josh to get their parents to stop talking with people they haven't seen since last year's meeting.

Towns, like Mousefield, which vote by floor meeting, elect a **moderator** to help run the town meeting. The moderator's job is to make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak and that the voting is fair.

Jessica thinks that watching town meeting is like watching a play.

The Mousefield town meeting begins when the moderator bangs her **gavel** (wooden hammer). After welcoming everyone to the meeting the moderator reads the first article on the warning and then sees if two people from the audience agree that the item should be voted on. Two voters must stand up and say some special words before the discussion and voting can begin. It usually sounds a lot like this:



Voters take turns letting people know what they think about the articles being discussed. They can ask the **assembly** (the voters at town meeting) to make **amendments** (changes) to the articles being voted on, and they try to convince other voters to vote for or against articles being discussed.

After every voter who wishes to has gotten a chance to speak a voter will ask the moderator to "call the question." This is a special motion to end the discussion and to vote. If the voters agree, the voting will begin.

There are three ways to vote at a floor meeting.



Voice Vote	Hand Count	Paper Ballot
<p>"All in favor say Yea, all opposed say nay"</p>	<p>"All in favor raise your hand"</p>	<p>"Write your vote on this paper"</p>

Floor meetings can last a few hours - or they can go all day. The length of the meeting depends on how many articles are on the warning and how many people want to talk about them.

Mousefield holds its town meeting in the morning and they have their school meeting in the afternoon. In between there is a potluck lunch. Jessica and Josh 's ball team has a bake sale to raise money for new uniforms. This is Jessica and Josh's favorite part of Town Meeting day!



Town Meeting Day With The Town Mice

On Town Meeting Day in Mouslington voting begins at 7:00 and ends at 7:00 at night. A voter can come in at any time during the day to vote. It only takes a few minutes.

This Town Meeting Day Ms. Kelly leaves work a little early to go to vote. She picks up Mr. Kelly from the Fire Station and they go to City Hall to vote. John, Lily and Sam come along too so that they can watch.

Outside City Hall the Girl Scouts are selling cookies. There is also a large display of the new hockey rink that is being proposed for the town.

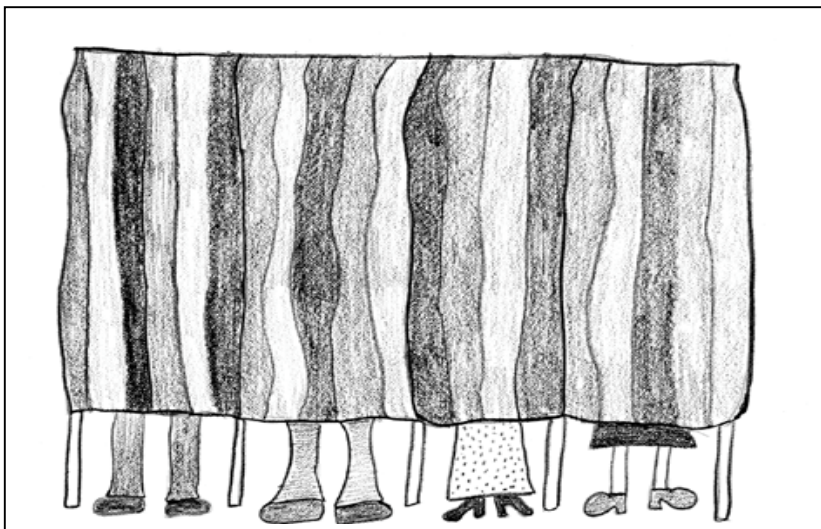


People on the recreation committee are handing out information about the proposed rink and asking people to vote in favor of it.

Kids from the high school are also outside City Hall asking people to vote for money for the teen center so they can show movies on Friday nights.

The Kelly family waits in line to check in before they can vote. When it is their turn Mr. and Ms. Kelly say their names and an election worker checks their names off of a list of voters in the town. Election workers make sure only voters who live in the town are given a ballot.

Mr. Kelly and Ms. Kelly take their ballots into a voting booth to vote in private. They can bring their children in with them to watch.





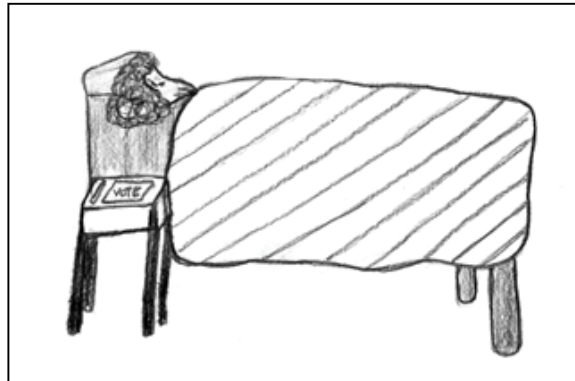
After they fill out their ballots, Mr. and Ms. Kelly put their ballots in a machine that counts their votes.

When the polls close at 7:00 p.m. the Clerk and the election workers will use the machines to help them count the vote. Sometimes counting goes late into the night.

Mr. Kelly won't know whether the voters decided to buy a new firetruck until he reads the election results in the newspaper the next day.

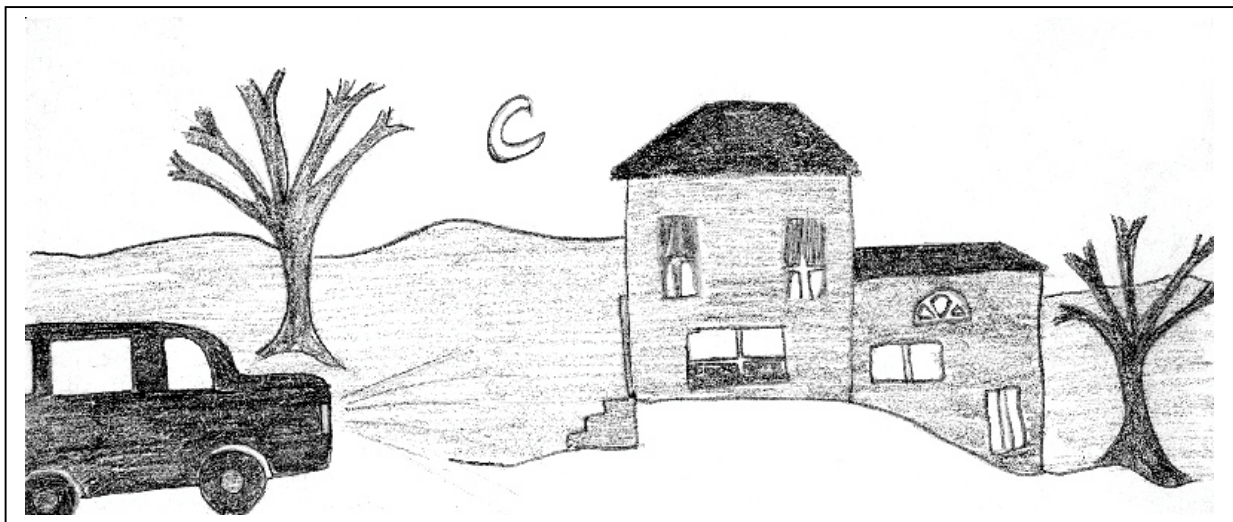
After voting, the Kelly family go to visit Aunt Alice who is in a nursing home.

Aunt Alice can't get to the polls because she is recovering from surgery, so this year she voted by absentee ballot.



The town clerk mailed a ballot to Aunt Alice the previous week. Aunt Alice voted her ballot and mailed it back to the clerk to be counted. Any Vermont voter who lives in a town that votes by Australian Ballot can vote using an absentee ballot.

Some sick people at the nursing home get ballots delivered to them by election workers on Town Meeting Day.



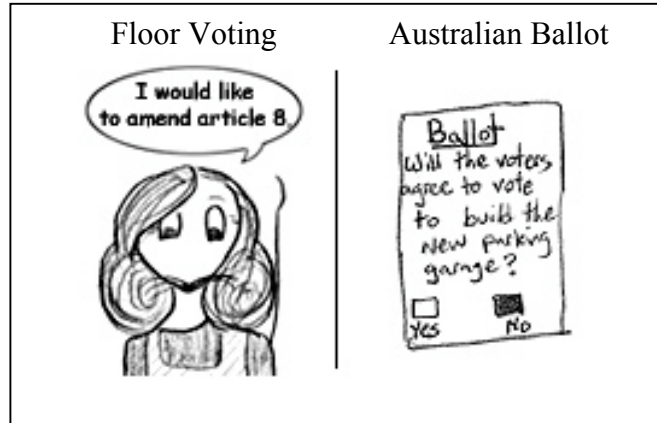
Floor Voting vs. Australian Ballot Voting

Here are some of the ways that Town Meetings are different depending on whether the town votes on the floor or by Australian ballot:

1. What is Being Voted:

Floor Meeting: The voters discuss the issues before they vote on them. If the voters don't like the proposal they can change it.

Australian Ballot: The voters can only vote for or against the article. They cannot discuss it or change it before voting on town meeting day.



2. How Much Time it Takes:

Floor Voting: Town meeting can last all day, depending on the number of issues being discussed and how many people want to speak.

Australian Ballot: Voting can take only a few minutes - and you can go to vote any time during the day when the polls are open.

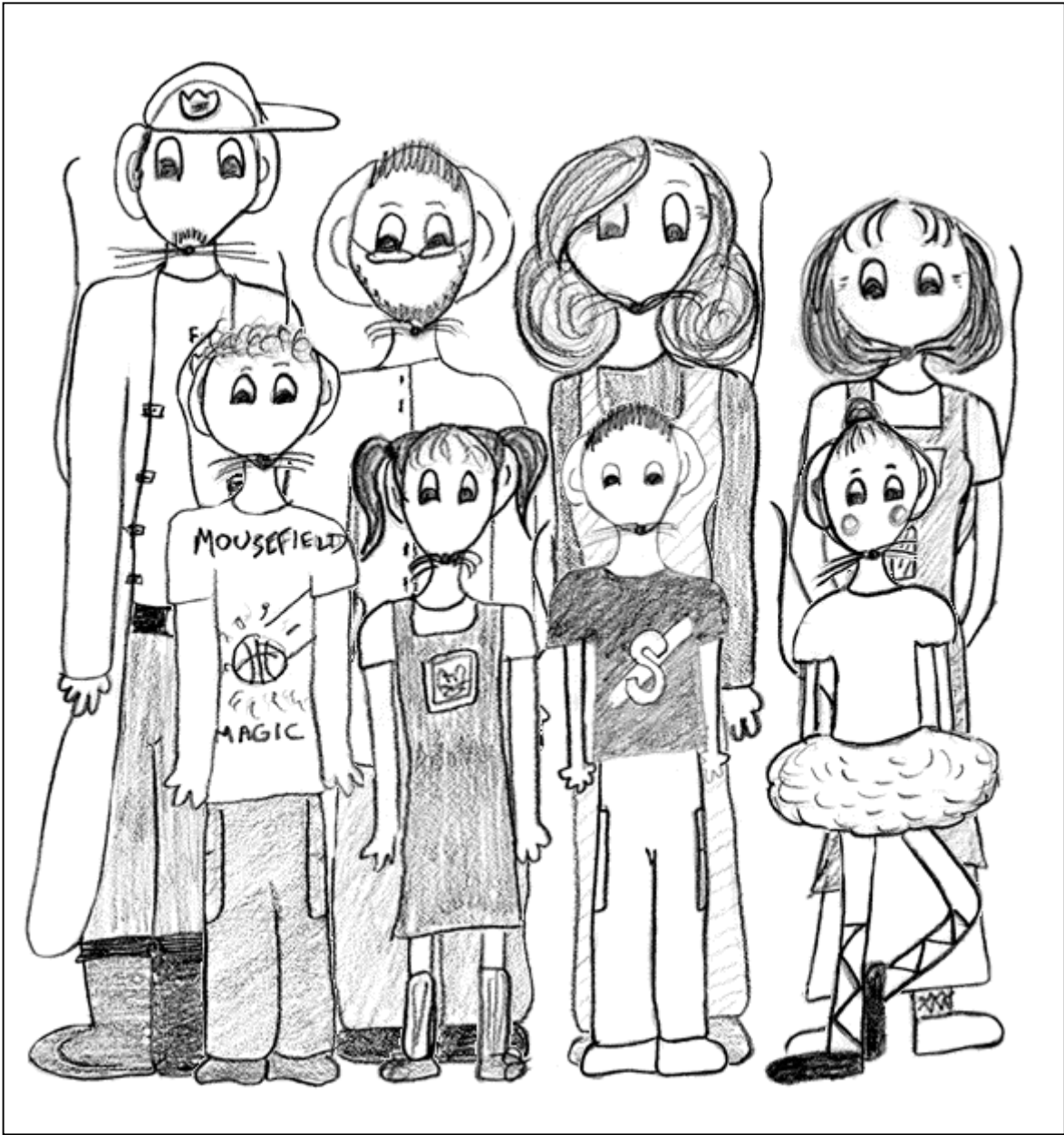
3. Voting Early or At Home:

Floor Meeting: To vote you have to come to the meeting and be there when the vote is taken. People who are sick or at work cannot vote.

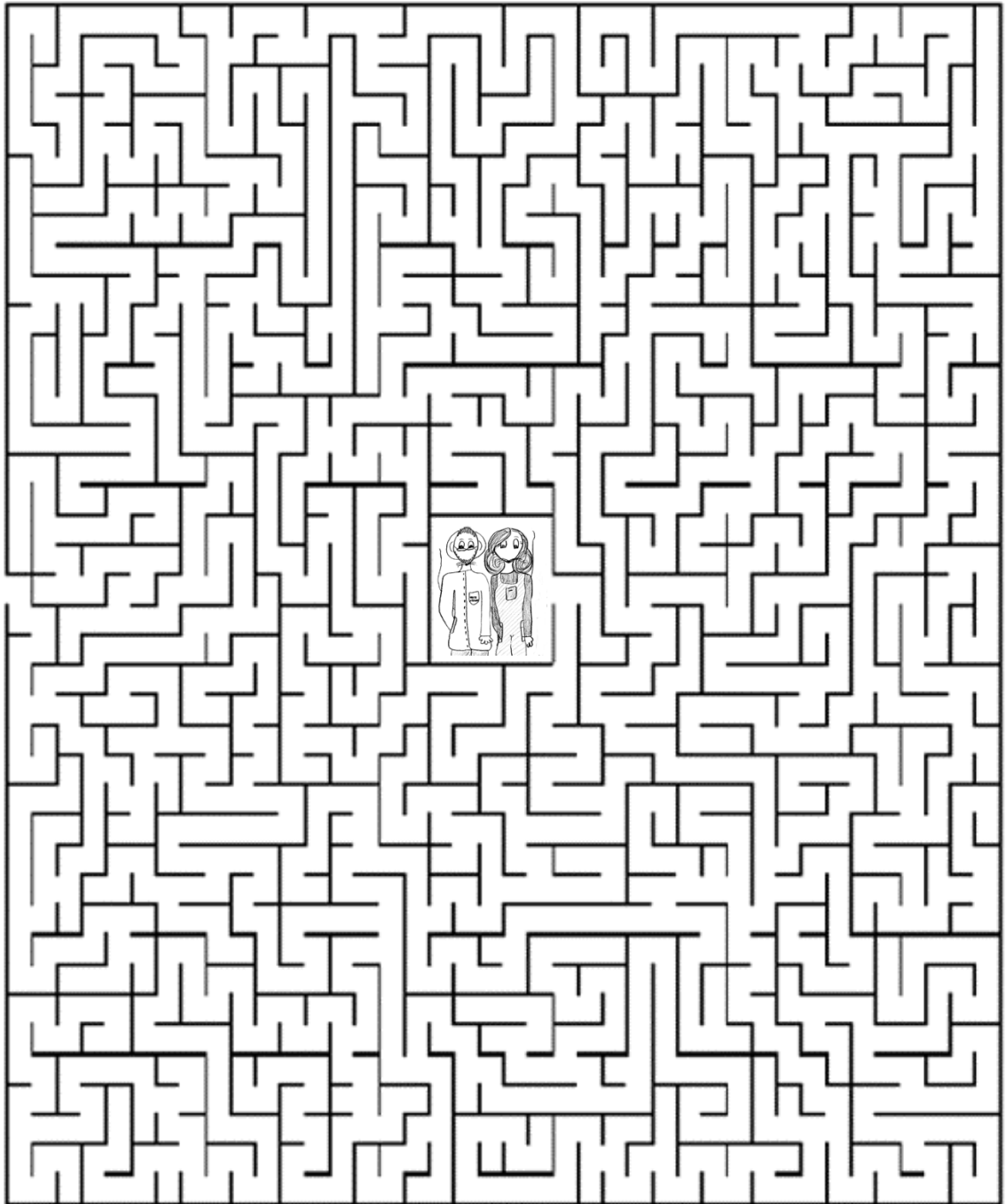
Australian Ballot: A person who doesn't want to come to the polls on Town Meeting Day can vote anyway by filling out a ballot at the town clerk's office or by mailing in a ballot by Town Meeting Day. Election workers will bring ballots to sick or disabled voters so they can vote too.



Whether your town votes on the floor or by Australian Ballot, Town Meeting is one of the things that makes Vermont so special!



Help The McKinleys Get To Town Meeting



Town Meeting Word Search

M O D E R A T O R N A Y D V P
L E V A G Y G A O L M A R F B
G U N D E N B T R B E D A Q W
V W N L I S G E E G N I O W M
G A E N E N T T P A D L B L F
H C R N I M Y R A B M O T T N
T A T N A A A L P S E H C A W
W E N J E U M E B Z N E E X E
E E O Q B C S A I M T U L E W
B R S E L C I T R A E Z E S V
Y Y C L E R K O R C R S S I B
H W F G G O T Z V A H L S J O
K Z N Z N W Q U Z U L A D A P
G Z N V Q V I R V K I I Q A S
V E S Z L G V U V C M M A C J

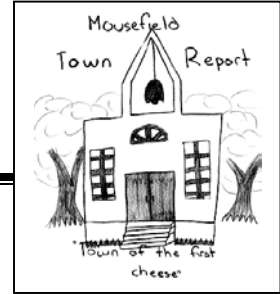


ABSENTEE
HOLIDAY
ASSEMBLY
PAPER
CLERK
VOICE

HAND
ARTICLES
MODERATOR
BENNINGTON
TAXES
GAVEL

AMENDMENT
MARCH
AUSTRALIA
SELECTBOARD
ELECT
WARNING

Town Meeting Crossword



A crossword puzzle grid with 19 numbered starting points. The grid is contained within a large rectangular border. The starting points are:

- 1: 5-letter horizontal word at the top left.
- 2: 1-letter vertical word starting from the 5th letter of 1.
- 3: 3-letter vertical word starting from the 4th letter of 1.
- 4: 5-letter horizontal word starting from the 2nd letter of 1.
- 5: 1-letter vertical word starting from the 2nd letter of 4.
- 6: 10-letter horizontal word starting from the 4th letter of 4.
- 7: 1-letter vertical word starting from the 7th letter of 4.
- 8: 1-letter vertical word starting from the 8th letter of 4.
- 9: 4-letter horizontal word starting from the 1st letter of 4.
- 10: 1-letter vertical word starting from the 10th letter of 4.
- 11: 1-letter vertical word starting from the 11th letter of 4.
- 12: 1-letter vertical word starting from the 12th letter of 4.
- 13: 5-letter vertical word starting from the 13th letter of 4.
- 14: 3-letter vertical word starting from the 14th letter of 4.
- 15: 4-letter horizontal word starting from the 15th letter of 4.
- 16: 6-letter horizontal word starting from the 16th letter of 4.
- 17: 4-letter horizontal word starting from the 17th letter of 4.
- 18: 1-letter vertical word starting from the 18th letter of 4.
- 19: 8-letter horizontal word starting from the 19th letter of 4.

The grid contains several empty cells for letters. A single cell at the intersection of the 8th letter of 4 and the 10th letter of 6 is shaded black, indicating a non-letter cell.

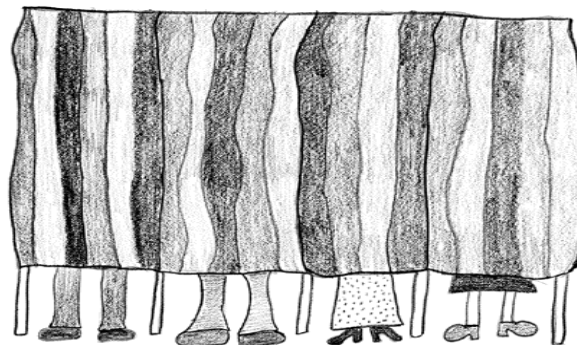
Town Meeting Crossword Clues

Across

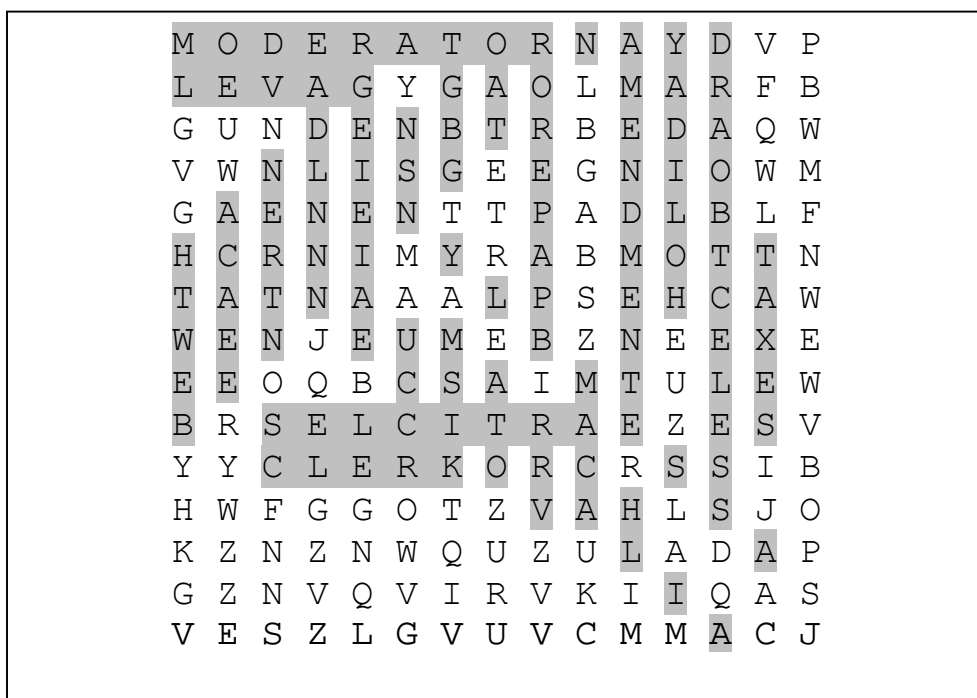
1. The month when we hold town meeting.
4. The Town's advertisement of when and where town meeting will be held and the list of items that are to be voted on.
6. A small group of people who are elected to run the town.
9. Wooden hammer that is banged to begin the floor meeting.
10. Changes to the articles being voted on.
15. When people gather together at a public meeting place like the town hall or local school to discuss and then vote on issues, they are voting at a _____ meeting.
16. Country that first voted by marking a secret ballot.
17. Person who is elected to keep the records of the town and run the elections.
19. A small group of people who are elected to make important decisions about the schools.

Down

2. You vote at a floor meeting by raising your _____.
3. The day of the week that we hold town meeting.
5. The voters at town meeting.
7. You vote at a floor meeting by marking a _____ ballot.
8. The small booklet that tells voters what has been going on in the town for the past year and lists the articles and warning for Town Meeting.
11. Choose by voting.
12. Person who is elected to pay the bills and keeps track of the town and school district's money.
13. The issues to be voted on at town meeting.
14. Voting at a floor meeting by saying "yea" or "nay" is a _____ vote.
18. Person who is elected to help run the town meeting.



Word Search Answer:



Crossword Puzzle Answers

Across

- 1. March
- 4. Warning
- 6. Selectboard
- 9. Gavel
- 10. Amendment
- 15. Floor
- 16. Australia
- 17. Clerk
- 19. Schoolboard

Down

- 2. Hand
- 3. Tuesday
- 5. Assembly
- 7. Paper
- 8. Report
- 11. Elect
- 12. Treasurer
- 13. Articles
- 14. Voice
- 18. Moderator

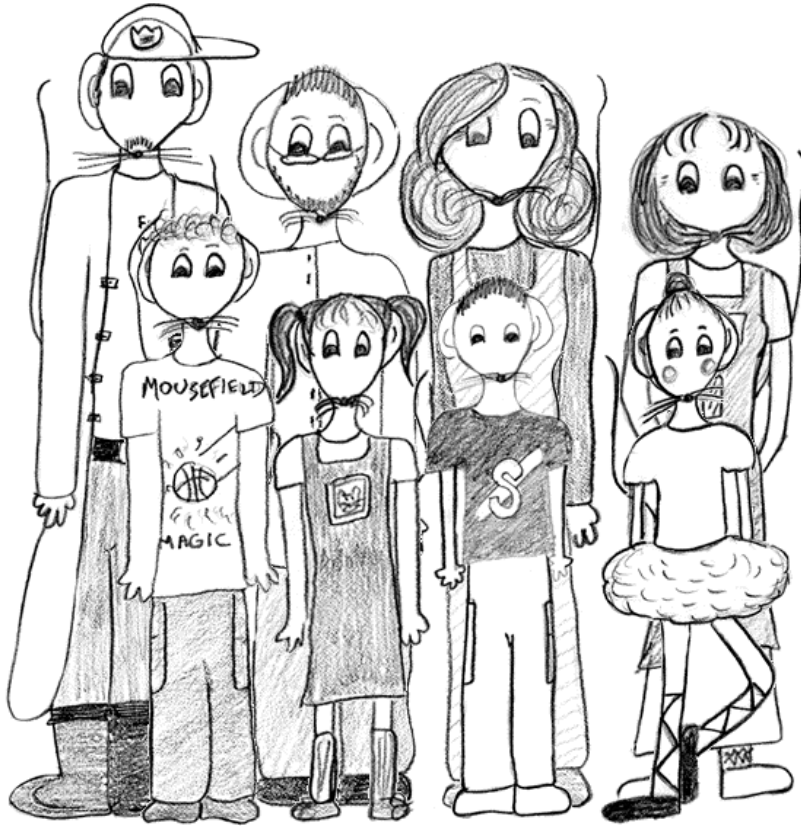
Vocabulary:

Amendment	Changes to the articles being voted on.
Articles	The issues to be voted on at town meeting.
Assembly	The voters at town meeting.
Australian Ballot	When people go to the polling place to vote by marking a secret ballot.
Elect	Choose by voting. At town meeting the voters elect people to serve as local officials.
Floor Meeting	When people gather together at a public meeting place like the town hall or local school to discuss and then vote on issues.
Gavel	Wooden hammer that is banged to begin the meeting.
Hand count	Voting at a floor meeting by raising your hand.
Moderator	Person who is elected to help run the town meeting. The moderator's job is to make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak and that the voting is fair.
Paper ballot	Voting at a floor meeting by marking a piece of paper.
Schoolboard	A small group of people who are elected to make important decisions about the schools.
Selectboard	A small group of people who are elected to run the town. (In cities voters elect a city council and mayor instead.)
Town Clerk	Person who is elected to keep the records of the town and run the elections.
Town Meeting Day	First Tuesday of every March when people vote on local issues and elect local officials at either a "floor meeting" or by "Australian Ballot."
Town Report	The town report is a small booklet that tells voters what has been going on in the town for the past year and lists the articles and warning for Town Meeting.
Treasurer	Person who is elected to pay the bills and keeps track of the town and school district's money.
Voice Vote	Voting at a floor meeting by saying "yea" or "nay"
Warning	The Town's advertisement of when and where town meeting will be held and the list of items to be voted on.

Town Mouse and Country Mouse Go To Town Meeting

A Short Booklet on Vermont Town Meeting

Teacher's Guide



Published By
Deborah L. Markowitz
Secretary of State
and Kids Voting Vermont
2003

Town Mouse and Country Mouse
Go To Town Meeting
A Short Booklet on Vermont Town Meeting

Teacher's Guide

The supplementary articles and classroom activities in this Teacher's Guide are designed to compliment the students' reading. We hope our short answers to the puzzler and the student questions will help you stimulate classroom discussion. This teacher's guide also includes suggestions for classroom activities and student exercises to help your class learn the value of participatory democracy and experience the concepts addressed in the written materials. We include a variety of activities in the hope that you will find one or more that will suit the needs of your classroom.

We welcome your suggestions about how to improve these materials and classroom activities. Please send your comments to Deb Markowitz, 26 Terrace Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05609-1101, dmarko@sec.state.vt.us.

**These materials and activities are aligned with
Vermont's Framework of Standards:**

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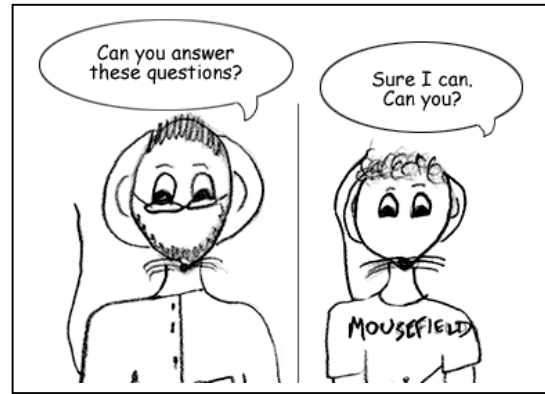
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Personal Development: 3.7 and 3.9

History and Social Studies: 6.9, 6.10, 6.11, 6.12, 6.13, 6.14, 6.17

☞ **For additional information about Vermont's Town Meeting visit the Kids Voting section of our Kid's Page at www.sec.state.vt.us.**

Student Question Handout



1. Why do you think town meeting was held in March?
2. Does it make sense to hold town meeting on a Tuesday? Why/Why not?
3. Should all Vermont businesses be required to give their employees the day off to go to their town meeting? Why/why not?
4. Why is it important to have a moderator at town meeting?
5. What is Australian Ballot voting?
6. What are the benefits of Australian Ballot voting?
7. What is a floor meeting?
8. What are the benefits of voting at floor meeting?

Student Question Answers:

- 1. Why do you think town meeting was held in March?** Most Vermonters were originally farmers. The weather and planting season made early March an ideal time for town meeting as it did not interrupt the farmer's chores.
- 2. Does it make sense to hold town meeting on a Tuesday? Why/Why not?** The tradition of meeting on the first Tuesday of March predated Vermont's statehood. However, with most Vermonters working off the land (not as farmers or foresters) and with many commuting to jobs in other towns, it is harder to get to town meeting during the week. Many people are not given the day off from work to go to town meeting. On the other hand, towns that have moved their town meeting to Saturday have not gotten more people to come to the town meeting.
- 3. Should all Vermont businesses be required to give their employees the day off to go to their town meeting? Why/why not?** It is the civic responsibility of Vermont's employers to give their employees the day off to go to town meeting. On the other hand, many employers cannot afford to close for the day and some service providers, like hospitals, police and fire departments must stay open and fully staffed.
- 4. Why is it important to have a moderator at town meeting?** The moderator makes sure that town meeting is fair and that everyone has an equal opportunity to speak so that they can affect the decisions of the meeting.
- 5. What is Australian Ballot voting?** Australian Ballot voting is voting by secret ballot in a voting booth or by absentee or early voting ballot. It takes only a few minutes and you can vote at your convenience at any time on town meeting day. All votes are yes/no votes.
- 6. What are the benefits of Australian Ballot voting?** Australian Ballot voting is more convenient and more inclusive than the traditional town meeting. It only takes a few minutes (in contrast to a day long meeting) and people who are sick, who have to work or who are out of town on Town Meeting Day can still participate by absentee or early voting ballots.
- 7. What is a floor meeting?** A floor meeting is the traditional town meeting voting that requires people to participate in a meeting that may last much of the day. At a floor meeting voters debate the issues and can make amendments before there is a vote. Voting is either by voice vote, a hand count or by paper ballot.
- 8. What are the benefits of voting at a floor meeting?** Traditional town meeting strengthens Vermont communities by bringing people together to discuss and decide on issues that effect the town. Face to face debates help neighbors better understand each other and lets people compromise. It also helps voters to be more educated on the issues and allows everyone to contribute toward finding solutions to the problems.

Town Meeting Classroom Activities

Activity #1 -Wishing Stars

At Town Meeting every community member has an opportunity to participate, and in doing so, share his or her ideas about how to make the town a better place for everyone to live. We can do this in the classroom as well. Decide what community you want the children to focus on (i.e. The world, our country, our state, your town or your classroom.)

- Ask the children to think about what they would wish for to make this community a better place.
- Cut out a star for each child to decorate and write out their wish.
- Pin or tape the stars to the bulletin board and ask each child to describe their wish to the class.



The teacher can ask the children whether they think wishes can come true, and to think about ways that they (or the class) can help make their own wishes come true. You can also ask the children whether they can think of anyone who had a wish or dream for our country or state and then helped make it come true. Martin Luther King, George Washington, and Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield of Ice Cream fame (having a business that helped people) are all examples of people who had wishes for our nation or state and made them come true.

Activity #2 - Mock Town Meeting: This activity is designed to allow students to experience town meeting and to encourage students to critically think about the difference between Australian Ballot voting and voting at traditional town meeting.

Set your town meeting warning (agenda). Start by asking students to list some of the rules in your classroom or school (ex. no spaghetti strap shirts, no soda in the cafeteria, after three in-excused late arrivals you get detention, etc. . . .) Come up with for ideas of other rules (or changes to the existing rules) that the class or school should consider adopting. (See below for issue ideas.) If you have financial resources available (some classes ask each child to bring in \$1.00) come up with a few ideas for how the class could spend the money (ex. for a class party, to buy books for a needy school, to redecorate the classroom . . .)

In the alternative, appoint three people to choose three voting issues for the class, and a proposal for how the classroom should spend its class money. As above, have the students begin by discussing school or class rules that currently exist and ask them to come up with new rules (or modification of existing rules) for the class's consideration. The committee of students should also brainstorm possible ways to use the class money – but they should agree on only one proposal to put to a vote of the class. The committee should deliver their three voting issues and budget proposal to the teacher who will write it up as a warning and post it in the classroom with the date and time of the voting.

Australian Ballot Vote. Ask one or two students (or ask the committee, if you had one) to briefly explain each of the proposal that will be put before the voters. Without discussion or debate (or limit questions to just a few) pass out ballots and ask the class to vote yes or no on each proposal.

☞ **Do not tally the results until after your traditional town meeting vote!**

Traditional Town Meeting Vote. First, six members of your class should be randomly designated as non-participants (draw numbers or pick names from a hat.) They are voters who cannot make it to town meeting because they are sick or disabled, or are at work. If you used a committee to come up with the articles, committee members should be the selectboard, and should be prepared to explain each of the articles. If your class came up with the articles together you should designate individuals in the class to be the selectboard explain each article. a group of students are picked to play the role of the selectboard.

The teacher should serve as the moderator of the classes' town meeting. The meeting begins when the moderator calls the meeting to order. The teacher should bring up each "article" in turn, ask for a motion and a second,. The moderator asks the "selectboard" to explain the proposal and tell the class why they recommend that the citizens vote for the proposal. The moderator then asks the assembly if there is any discussion on the proposal. The students should be directed to ask questions about what the proposal means or to make arguments for or against the proposal. (Groups could prepare these questions and explanations in advance or the teacher could step in to clarify the proposal and to help students to think of questions on the spot.) Ask the students if any of them wish to offer an amendment to the proposal, and then discuss and vote on the proposed amendment. When discussion is complete ask for a voice vote on the issue – or a show of hands. If the issue is contentious you might even suggest a paper ballot.

When all of the articles are decided the moderator closes the meeting.

After the Vote. Compare the results of the Australian Ballot vote and the floor vote. Were there any surprises? As voters how was the experience different? How did it feel to be one of the people who were left out of the voting?

Issue ideas: Should the school require students to wear uniforms? Should the school have a dress code? Should there be more school busses so all students can take the bus? Should we have school year round? Should we have soda at school? Should the town build a hockey rink? Should pets be able to come to school? Should students be allowed to chew gum at school?