



The Public Agenda

Overview

This lesson introduces students to the public agenda and its importance to policy. First, students read about and discuss the public agenda and ways that citizens can influence it. Then pairs of students are given different situations, and they develop strategic plans for getting their issues or solutions to issues on the public agenda.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Define “public agenda.”
- Explain different ways that citizens can influence what is on the public agenda.
- Create a plan for getting a hypothetical issue on the public agenda.

Preparation & Materials

- [Handout A: Setting the Public Agenda](#)—1 per student
- [Handout B: Issues](#)—Cut out one issue per group
- [Handout C: Options for Influencing the Public Agenda](#)—1 per student

Procedure

I. Focus Discussion

A. Hold a discussion by asking students:

- What are some current political issues that are being debated?
- Do you think these issues are the most important issues we face? Why?

B. Tell students that the issues they identified are part of what is called the “public agenda.”

II. Reading and Discussion—Setting the Public Agenda

A. Distribute [Handout A: Setting the Public Agenda](#) to each student. Ask students to read the handout and look for what the public agenda is and how citizens can help influence it.

B. When students finish reading, hold a discussion using the questions at the end of the handout:

- What is the public agenda?
- How is the public agenda set? Who influences it?

III. Small-Group Activity—Getting on the Public Agenda

A. Divide students into small groups (2–6 students). Explain that they are going to be given an issue and that they will work with their group to create a plan that they think would help get their issue on the public agenda. Let them know that they will be provided with ideas to get them started.

Distribute one of the issues from [Handout B: Issues](#) to each group and [Handout C: Options for Influencing the Public Agenda](#) to each student.

C. When students are ready, call on each group to present its plans and hold a class discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of each plan.

IV. Debrief

A. Ask students:

- Which of these issues do you think would be the most difficult to get on the public agenda? The easiest? Why?
- Why is it important to know about the public agenda?
- Is the issue or policy you are working on already on the public agenda? (Help students realize that schools, cities, states, etc. have “public agendas.”)
- Why or why not?

B. After completing this lesson, have students return to the Citizenship Brainstorm, identifying and adding to the lists.