

“Setting the Agenda”

Evan Warner - October 5, 2013

Overview

As stated on the *Setting the Agenda* section of the *Library of Parliament* web site (<http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/Education/SetAgenda/index-e.asp>):

“This resource enables students to experience a typical “day in the life” of a parliamentarian and understand the decisions Senators and MPs must make when scheduling their many duties and activities.”

Nova Scotia Curriculum Outcomes:

Grades: 6 to 10

GCO: Citizenships, Power and Governance

Key Stage Learning Curriculum Outcomes: End of Grade 9

- Explain the origins, purpose, function and decision making of Canadian Governments and how their powers are acquired, used, and justified.
- Explain how the Canadian political and legal system establishes order and manages conflict while meeting the needs of its citizens

SCO's:

- Gain an understanding of the respective roles of Senators and MPs
- Develop an awareness of the bicameral nature of Parliament
- Exercise skills in collaborative decision-making; selecting, organizing and presenting information and defending positions taken

Summary of Original Setting the Agenda Activity

While described in detail on the website, the activity *Setting the Agenda* can be simplified into the following steps:

Introduction

- Students read the resources provided on the website to gain an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both Senators and Members of Parliament (MP).

Development

- The class is split up into small groups of 3-4 students. Half of the groups are Senator groups and half are MP groups.
- Each group selects one member to become the Senator or MP (hereby called representatives) and the rest of the group are his or her assistants.
- Each group is given a mostly blank schedule for a day in the life of the representative.
- Each group is given an envelope containing requests for the representative's attention (e.g. you have been invited to a dinner at the National Arts Centre for a national youth conference from 6:00 to 10:00 p.m. One of your constituents is attending.)
- There are more requests than can reasonably be filled in a single day.
- It is the job of the group to discuss and decide which requests can and cannot be accommodated.

Closure

- Students are then asked to respond to a series of provided questions about how they made their choices.

Assessment

- Lastly, the Senatorial Groups and Parliamentary Groups merge and discuss the differences between the two roles.

Adaptations to Setting the Agenda

While I believe that some of the ideas presented in this activity are interesting, I feel strongly that it is lacking strong student engagement and involvement. I therefore propose a number of changes to the activity that I believe would make it more relevant to students and empower them to be more actively engaged.

Introduction

- I believe that understanding the role that Senators and MPs play in government cannot be adequately taught by just reading written descriptions. I also didn't find the supplied reading particularly engaging and would find a better way to introduce it to students in prior lessons.
- Due to changes to the activity, I would also recommend the grade level be changed to a minimum of grade 9.
- I would write letters on each request form so that they can be more easily compared amongst groups visually in the assessment activity (A, B, C, ect.)

Development

- I would ask students to break up into groups of 7 instead of 3-4.
- Each group would choose (or the teacher could choose) one team of senators (3) and two interest groups of 2 students each.
- The envelope of requests for the representative would then be divided into two with each Interest Group receiving half.

- Approximately 15-20 minutes would be allotted for each interest group to read through their requests. For each request students should write down 1 or more positive consequences and 1 or more negative consequences that would happen if the request were to be accepted or rejected.
- The representative group is also given a full envelope of all of the requests and has time now to read through them and begin to arrange them into order of importance.
- Once both interest groups have had enough time to come up with positive and negative consequences, it is now time for them to present them to the representatives.
- The procedure to be followed is illustrated using the graphic organizer 1a.
- The representative group uses majority voting amongst themselves to any choices that need to be made.
- The representatives receives a negative consequence for every rejected request.
- The Representative receives a positive consequence for every request accepted.

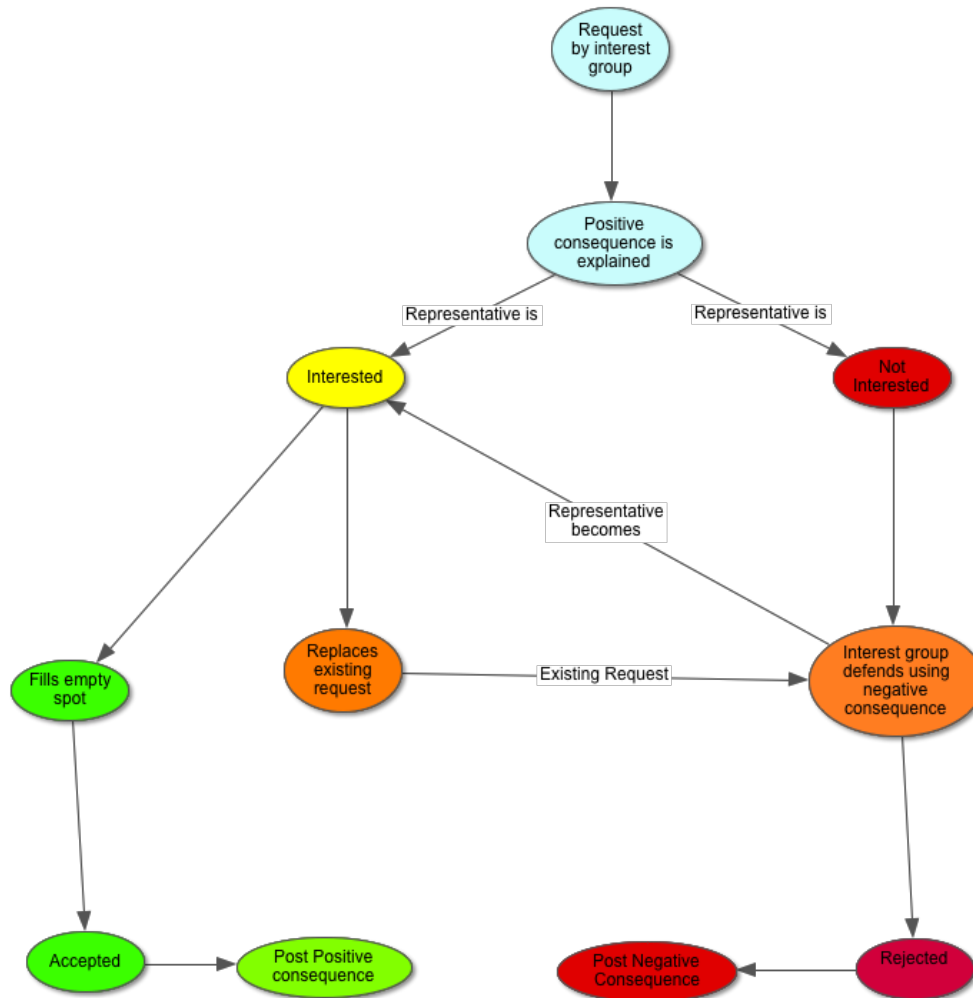


Fig. 1a

Group Goals

Representative Group

- Fill the daily schedule
- Finish the day having accumulated (arguably) better positive consequences than negative consequences.

Interest group

- Successfully persuade the representatives to accept as many of your requests as possible.

Closure

- In each group, evaluate using the goals if they have succeeded or not. Why or why not?
- Why were some requests successful and others not?

Assessment

- Regroup back into class group and have each group present their findings.
- Challenge student to find commonalities between different Senate Groups, different MP Groups and between MPs and Senate Groups.

Differentiation

IEP

Students on an IEP could use the original activity that is simpler and easier to follow. Despite their differences in procedure, both activities use the same resources and end up covering the same outcomes. Because of this, the differentiated learning group could still share their experiences and be part of the wider group discussion, despite having gone through a simpler activity.

Variations

Taking into consideration peer feedback, another variation on the activity might involve the entire class instead of individual groups. The class could first elect 3 senators. Secondly, the rest of the class might break into pairs and each be given 1-2 of the requests. It would be their responsibility to come up with positive and negative consequences. You might give them some research time to learn more about their issues so that they can better defend them. This might shorten the length of the activity because each group would have fewer requests to deal with.

Extra Resources

Achieve of Canadian Politics and Public Affairs

<http://www.cpac.ca/eng>

This site catalogues political video and in particular video from the house of commons, committees and sub committees and gives a real world look at the day to day

functioning of the government. It could be used earlier in the unit when learning about the specific functions of the house and senate.

Library of Parliament – Education Home

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/AboutEducation.aspx?Language=E>

This is the main site from which Setting the Agenda is one part. It contains educational resources for many different grade levels and other activities such as lesson plans including a “Model Parliament Unit”

References

Library of Parliament. (October, 2007). Setting the Agenda. In Parliament of Canada. Retrieved October 4, 2013, from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/Education/SetAgenda/index-e.asp>.

All required resources from the original lesson are contained here including the “Sample Senate Calendar”, “Daily Order of Business (House of Commons)” and “Request for Senators / Members Attendance” in addition to recommended readings.