

Who Makes the Decisions? A Town Meeting



Lesson at a Glance

One solution to protect marine environments is to establish reserves or sanctuaries. This process usually has an impact on different user groups. Public hearings are held to collect information and hear everyone's concerns. Students will participate in a town meeting activity to decide whether to establish a coastal and marine sanctuary.

Objectives

Students be able to:

- Recognize the conflicting interests that determine public policy.
- Make an informed decision on an environmental issue.

Background Information

Environmental policies affect many people. Regulating land uses or human behavior is often controversial. There are often public hearings to find out what people think before regulations are set in place. The opinions often conflict and officials must make choices to best serve the community.

Materials Needed

- Identification Cards for Each Presenter
- Paper and Pencils for City Council Members
- Clock or stopwatch for the timekeeper

Student Activity

1. Town Meeting

Copy the identification cards and number them in the order you would like them to be presented. Choose students to be presenters and hand them a card. Three students are city council members who will listen and make a final decision. One student is a timekeeper who will make sure nobody talks for over two minutes. Students who are not presenters are concerned citizens who can ask questions and choose sides. Place the city council members and the timekeepers at the



head of the room. Introduce the town meeting to the students by reading the paragraph below.

READ TO THE CLASS:

A town meeting has been called and everyone is picking sides. An area may be set aside as a coastal and marine sanctuary. The seabirds, marine animals and coral reef would be protected. There is also a historic heiau on the coast that would be protected. Some people want to protect the area. But this area also has been considered for a hotel. The hotel would provide a lot of jobs. There are also people who use the area for fishing, boating, kayaking and surfing. Would the marine sanctuary kick everyone out? The city council members have called a meeting to hear everyone's opinion and make a decision about the sanctuary.

Have the presenters each speak. Concerned citizens can ask questions between presentations. After the presentations, the city council members will take a short break to decide on the sanctuary. After hearing the decisions, have students discuss the following:

- What do you think of the decision?
- What other information could you have used to make a decision?
- Did you agree with the group you were asked to represent?
- Was any one person right or wrong at this meeting?
- How do officials make decisions when there are so many viewpoints?
- Can officials please everyone?
- What decision would you have made in this situation?

2. Investigating a Local Issue

Find a local environmental issue that is being considered by the community. Have students attend public meetings and report back to the class about what is being discussed and different role groups that are involved and their concerns. Invite local community members to come into the class to discuss the issue. Encourage students to write letters, attend sessions and get involved.

(Adapted from Habitat Fun Pack, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1992)



Issue being considered by the Town Council: "Should an area be set aside as a coastal and marine sanctuary?"

(Give one copy to each student)

"A town meeting has been called and everyone is picking sides. An area may be set aside as a coastal and marine sanctuary. The seabirds, marine animals and coral reef would be protected. There is also a historic heiau on the coast that would be protected. Some people want to protect the area. But this area also has been considered for a hotel. The hotel would provide a lot of jobs. There are also people who use the area for fishing, boating, kayaking and surfing. Would the marine sanctuary kick everyone out? The city council members have called a meeting to hear everyone's opinion and make a decision about the sanctuary."

Bob the Biologist

Remember, Bob, you stand for the birds, fish, and marine animals that live in the coastal and marine environments. These animals cannot speak for themselves. There need to be a few areas on the main Hawaiian islands left undisturbed for these animals. Could this area be one of them?

The seabirds come in from the ocean to use the land as nesting area. Without protection, their nesting areas would be built over.

Monk seals and sea turtles haul out on the shore to rest and to give birth or lay eggs. They need a quiet, protected area.

Whales, dolphins, and coral reef animals live offshore. They all need an undisturbed, protected area.

Samantha the Surfer

Remember, Samantha, you represent all the surfers, kayakers, snorkelers, scuba divers, and swimmers who use this area for fun. These sports do not injure the environment and they bring in tourists who spend money in the community.

Kauai has some of the best surfing in the world and surfing is a traditional Hawaiian sport. A lot of people would be upset if this area was closed.

The coral reef is a great place to snorkel and scuba dive. It also creates a protected area for swimming. There are also people who just like to come and sit at the beach.

Why can't there be a sanctuary that allows for people who don't harm the environment? Does the sanctuary have to kick everyone out?

Dan the Developer

Remember, Dan, you have been thinking about building a hotel on this land for quite a while. If the sanctuary is created, you won't be able to build a hotel.

A hotel would create jobs. People have to build the hotel and work in the hotel.

The hotel would also draw more tourists who would spend more money. All the restaurants and stores in the area would benefit.

A hotel would bring money to a lot of people. How does the wildlife help people?

Fred the Fisherman

Remember, Fred, you have fished in this area all your life. Your parents and grandparents fished here and you want your children to fish here, too.

Fishing doesn't harm the environment. Fishermen only catch what they need to make a living. Pollution and overpopulation are the real problems, not fishing.

Fishermen have a respect for the sea and the animals. They would not harm the sea.

Why can't there be a sanctuary that allows the fishermen to continue fishing?

Belinda the Boater

Remember, Belinda, you represent all the boaters who use this area for tours. If this area is closed, you will have lost a place to boat.

Boat tours bring tourists to the area to spend money. The boat tours also teach the tourists about the coastal and marine environment.

The boaters already follow regulations to protect seals, dolphins, and whales. Boats are not allowed to approach or harass whales or seals. The exhaust and the gas fumes from the boat only cause minor damage to coral reefs.

You'll support a sanctuary as long as you are allowed to bring boat tours into the area.

Pam the Planner

Remember, Pam, you have to represent everybody. Your job is to present the best solution to city council.

The area needs money from tourism. The hotel could bring a lot of money to the area. The sanctuary regulations could put people out of business.

But many people visit the area to see the natural and historical resources - the seabirds, marine animals, coral reef, and heiau. If these are slowly destroyed, a tourist attraction will be gone.

The historical heiau needs to be protected for future generations. Fishermen depend on a healthy, unpolluted, ocean. The sports enthusiasts need places to play.

Is there a compromise that will please as many people as possible and protect the wildlife and the heiau? Should there be a sanctuary? What regulations should there be?

Mr. Birdwatcher

Remember, Mr. Birdwatcher, you represent all the bird watchers in the Bird Watchers' Society. You love your birds and want them to be protected.

There are only a few places left for watching seabirds on the main Hawaiian islands and this area is one of them.

A sanctuary would guarantee the protection of this area. You fully support a sanctuary. There should be places where people can watch wildlife.

Ms. History

Remember, Ms. History, you represent all the Historical Society members. You also stand for all the old places left in the area.

A heiau is on the site where the sanctuary will be. A sanctuary would guarantee protection of the heiau.

So many historical places have been lost or destroyed. It is important to save what is left.

The heiau is also important for archaeology - the study of ancient cultures. The heiau can teach about Hawaiian history.

You support the sanctuary because it will save the heiau.

Bronson the BMX Biker

Remember, Bronson, you represent all the bikers in the area. You have been using the coastal area as a riding site for a long time.

There are only a few public areas to bike and this is one. If it is gone, bikers will have less places to ride. Biking is a fun sport and there need to be areas left to bike on.

Bikers only ride on the sand and dirt. They don't hurt the plants or birds. Bikers shouldn't be kicked out of the area; there should just be some education about where it's okay to bike.

You support a sanctuary as long as bikers are still allowed to ride there.

Three City Council Members

Remember, city council members, you have to make a decision that reflects what the community wants. You were elected by the people to represent them - all of them.

You must listen carefully to the presenters and the concerned citizens in the audience.

Should there be a coastal and marine sanctuary or should the land be left open for development? If it is a sanctuary, who should be allowed to use the area - fishermen, boaters, surfers, kayakers, snorkelers, scuba divers, BMX bikers, birdwatchers? If it is a sanctuary, what are the rules? If you decide to not have a sanctuary, what regulations should there be? Can the hotel be built? Where can it be built?

Timekeeper

Remember, timekeeper, everyone is going to be very talkative. Your job is to make sure everyone follows the rules and gets a chance to speak.

Each of the presenters should not go over the time limit of two minutes.

Questions from the concerned citizens in the audience should be short - about 30 seconds each.

The city council members are counting on you to keep order at the town meeting. Good Luck!