

Who's Who in the Wisconsin Legislature?

Subject and Grade Level: Middle or High School
Time: 45-90 minutes

Guiding Question: Who represents you in the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate?

Overview

Students will investigate their representatives in order to find out more about the people who make decisions at the state level on their behalf. Learning about the background of legislators helps students to understand what drives them as they make decisions about the direction of our state. Those who seek elected office are motivated by a variety of personal and professional factors. In this lesson students learn more about their own elected representatives, and consider what factors would influence them if they became a lawmaker.

Objectives

Knowledge

- Students will identify their state assembly and legislative districts, and the people who represent them.

Skills

- Students will use the internet to research

Dispositions

- Students will consider the factors that impact a person's goals, motivations and decisions.

Wisconsin Model Academic Standards

- E.8.2 Give examples to explain and illustrate how factors such as family, gender, and socioeconomic status contribute to individual identity and development
- E.12.2 Explain how such factors as physical endowment and capabilities, family, gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, attitudes, beliefs, work, and motivation contribute to individual identity and development
- C.12.9 Identify and evaluate the means through which advocates influence public policy

Wisconsin Disciplinary Literacy Standards

Writing

- 9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- 10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Reading

- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Materials:

- "Who Represents Me" Worksheet
- Group Discussion Prompts
- Optional Assessment "Personal Political Profile" or "Letter to Legislator"
- Website for the Wisconsin Legislature, with the "Find your legislator" tool.
<https://legis.wisconsin.gov/>

- **TEACHER GENERATED:** Use [WisconsinEye](#) to find floor testimony, press conferences, or committee hearing discussion from your representatives to share with your students.

The following clips contain emotionally challenging content, please preview prior to showing to your class.

REP JASON FIELDS (D) on Assembly floor, May 10, 2011, regarding how he cares for young black youth in his district. (5 minutes)

STATE REPRESENTATIVE MANDY WRIGHT (D): Discusses her own rape as a child. (7 minutes)

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SONDY POPE (D): Discusses her husband's pancreatic cancer and her own multiple miscarriages and abortions. (5 minutes)

REP. JOHN NYGREN (R) Discusses his daughter's addiction. (9 minutes)

REP. JIMMY ANDERSON (D) Shares his story about being paralyzed by drunk driver. (2 minutes)

Plan of Instruction/Lesson Procedures

1. Quick Write "What do you think motivates a person to pursue elected office, such as mayor, state senator, state assembly, or governor." After giving students 5 minutes to reflect and write, ask them to pair up and share their ideas. Call on each group and ask them to share their ideas, making a list on the board.
2. Hook:
 - a. (Optional) invite an influential personal (administrator, superintendent, school board member, police liaison officer, etc...) to come in and tell a personal story from their life that helped shape them and motivated them to pursue their chosen career, or was influential in forming their opinions or ideas on policy issues.
 - b. Show one or more of the clips linked above which demonstrate passionate, personal testimony by legislators. Please preview the clips prior to showing them to your class to gauge the appropriateness.
3. Introduce the **Guiding Question:** *Who represents you in the state legislature?* The purpose of this lesson is to dig deeply into the background and personal story of your representatives to better understand why they ran for office, what motivates them and what specific issues ignite their interest.
4. Using a projector, demonstrate how to use the "Find Your Legislator" function on the Wisconsin Legislature [website](#). (Type in the name of your town, or use the map to click on your location). Ask students to record the names and parties of their legislatures. Then split the class in half and assign half to research the Assembly person, and half to research the Senator. Have them circle the representative assigned to them.
5. Homework/Computer Lab: Students will explore the official legislative webpage of their assigned representative, then look for additional information on any personal web pages, or campaign pages. After conducting this research, they will write a brief political profile of their legislator, (Use "Who Represents Me" worksheet)

6. Either return to class, or begin the next class by showing Wisconsin Eye clips (teacher generated) of your representative speaking in session, a hearing, campaign interview, or press conference, then provide an opportunity to ask clarifying questions.
7. Break the class into groups of 4, where each group has two students that researched the Assembly person and two that researched the Senator. Provide each group with one copy of the Group Discussion Prompt.

Assessment/Reflection

Personal Political Profile: Create a personal political profile. What personal experiences and values shape your motivations and beliefs? How would this impact your actions as an elected official?

OR

Letter to a Legislator: Write a letter to one of your legislators about an issue that is important to you. In your letter, comment on what you learned about their background, and try to make a connection. Include a personal story that would help them understand your experiences and values that shape your beliefs.

Who Represents Me in the Wisconsin Legislature?

Record the names of your representatives, and **circle** the one assigned to you.

Representative in the State Assembly: _____ (D / R)

Representative in the State Senate: _____ (D / R)

Use the official Legislative Website for your representative to collect the following information:

Biography

Identify THREE pieces of information in the biography that help you understand your legislator better:

1.

2.

3.

Authored Proposals

Read through the list of legislative proposals that your representative has sponsored. (By clicking the links you can view the “Bill Text”, which begins with a brief summary of the bill.) After reviewing the list, identify THREE bills that help you understand what topics your legislator cares about. Record the number, title, and a one sentence summary of each bill.

1.

2

3.

Other Information

Follow the links to any personal or campaign webpages. If no link is available, do an internet search to find a personal or campaign web page. After reviewing this web page, record three pieces of new information that help you understand your legislator better.

1.

2.

3.

Political Profile: Based on the information you gathered, write a brief biography of your legislator, focusing on information that helps you understand them as a person, their motivations for seeking office, and what past experiences or background helps inform their position on issues.

Group Discussion Prompt: (choose one time keeper)

Each group member has three minutes to share what they learned about their representative. After sharing discuss the following questions:

1. Was there one piece of information that you found especially surprising or interesting as you researched and learned about these representatives?
2. Based on what you learned about your representatives, do you feel good about having these people working to create new laws and policies on your behalf? Why or why not?
3. If you met one of these representatives, what would you say to them?
4. Do you think that you would even want to run for political office? (any elected school board, city council, mayor, state or federal office) Why or why not?

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Personal Political Profile

Create a personal political profile. What personal experiences and values shape your motivations and beliefs? How would this impact your actions as an elected official?

Letter to a Legislator

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