

MODULE 1

◆◆◆ THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS ◆◆◆

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TEACHER NOTES

Beginning with the democratic process, Module I sets the stage for civic involvement. Some students may be familiar with the experience of voting in their native countries; for others, electing government leaders may be a new concept.

Begin the module with an actual voting experience. Choose something that the class would be interested in, for example, the time or length of the coffee break. Use this opportunity to illustrate majority rule. Then explore with students the venues in everyday life that use voting to elect leaders and make decisions: school boards, labor unions, organizations, school classes, and so on. Cultural comparisons to the students' native countries in the first Pre-Reading Activity will provide a good frame of reference for understanding when and how leaders are elected, various terms of office, and opportunities for re-election. To enhance comprehension of geographical areas of state and local government, you can use maps to show cities, villages, and counties in your state.

Supplemental information about the voting process and local government can be added at your discretion. If the level of the class and student interest warrant more detail, you may expand on the following:

- Local examples of referenda
- Public hearings (and how they are publicized) vs. regular city council meetings
- Non-partisan elections, such as those for school board positions
- Local exceptions to information about community and county government (e.g., library under jurisdiction of the city instead of the county)
- Voting rights withheld from convicted felons or those legally insane

COMPETENCIES FOR MODULE 1

Students will learn to:

1. Define voting.
2. Explain the importance of voting.
3. List the requirements for voting in the United States.
4. Identify the titles of executive leaders of national, state, and local government.
5. Identify the legislative leaders of national, state, and local government.
6. Explain the roles of the school board and the county board.
7. Participate in the decision-making process in their communities.

A NOTE ON THE CONTENT AND MATERIALS OF MODULE 1

Module 1, *The Democratic Process*, is the only module in the *Community Connections* curriculum that is a double module. That is, there are two topics related to the democratic process in the module: 1) Voting and 2) Participating in State & Local Government. Each of these topics has its own set of pictures and its own reading passage (with related vocabulary activities and comprehension check). However, there is only one set of Extension Activities and one set of Experiential Activities for the module.

In order to make this module accessible to students, you may need to familiarize yourself with the structure, responsibilities, and services of your county and local governments (city, village, or township). Sources of information are the local offices, web sites, and newsletters of the county and local governments.

TEACHER NOTES continued

POSSIBLE AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

- Local newspapers (some newspapers offer free copies to educational institutions)
- Community newsletters
- Voter registration form
- Sample ballot
- Campaign literature
- Voting machines (available from your local election authority, e.g., the county clerk/county board of elections)
- Videotaped TV campaign ads
- Free handbooks on state government available from state agencies
- Web sites of community and state governments

RESOURCES*

Print Materials

Civic Participation and Community Action Sourcebook, Andy Nash, ed. (1999). Published by the New England Resource Center, Boston, (617) 482-9485, www.nelrc.org. An intermediate/advanced ESL curriculum containing descriptions of actual community participation projects and activity guides for preparing students for community action.

Handbook of Illinois Government. Available from the Office of the Secretary of State, 213 State House, Springfield, IL, 62706, (217) 782-2201 or (312) 814-2975, www.sos.state.il.us. A concise guide to Illinois state government and the current elected officials.

Illinois Blue Book. Available from the Office of the Secretary of State, 213 State House, Springfield, IL 62706, (217) 782-2201 or (312) 814-2975, www.sos.state.il.us. A comprehensive guide to Illinois government, state legislators, state departments, and other statistics and information.

Key to Government in Chicago and Suburban Cook County, Alfred Saucedo, ed. (2002). Available from Citizens Information Services of Illinois, (312) 939-4636, www.cisil.org. General overview of local government system (county, township, and special districts) and a guide to the election system, voting, and taxes.

New Citizens Vote! An Educational Curriculum About Voting and Civic Engagement. Published by the Northern California Citizenship Project, (415) 621-4808 or download off the web at www.ncg.org/difference/citi_curr.html. A curriculum designed to provide new and prospective citizens with tools to become involved in civic and electoral activities.

“Illinois Students Vote” teacher’s packet. Published by the League of Women Voters of Illinois Education Fund, 332 South Michigan, Chicago, IL 60604, (312) 939-5935. A set of reproducible classroom activities focused on the election process. Curriculum outline available at www.illinoisstudentsvote.org.

“Making Your Voice Heard” brochure. Published by the League of Women Voters of Illinois Education Fund, 332 South Michigan, Chicago, IL 60604, (312) 939-5935. Provides information about contacting legislators and public officials. (Also available in Spanish.)

TEACHER NOTES continuedWeb Sites

State of Illinois

www.state.il.us

Information about state government and living/working in Illinois.

Project Vote Smart

www.vote-smart.org

Information about federal and state government officials and their positions and voting records.

Young Voters Program

www.youngvoters.org

Information on candidates and their positions on issues and how to contact legislators.

Your Congress

www.yourcongress.com

Information on how Congress works and ways to contact legislators.

Video

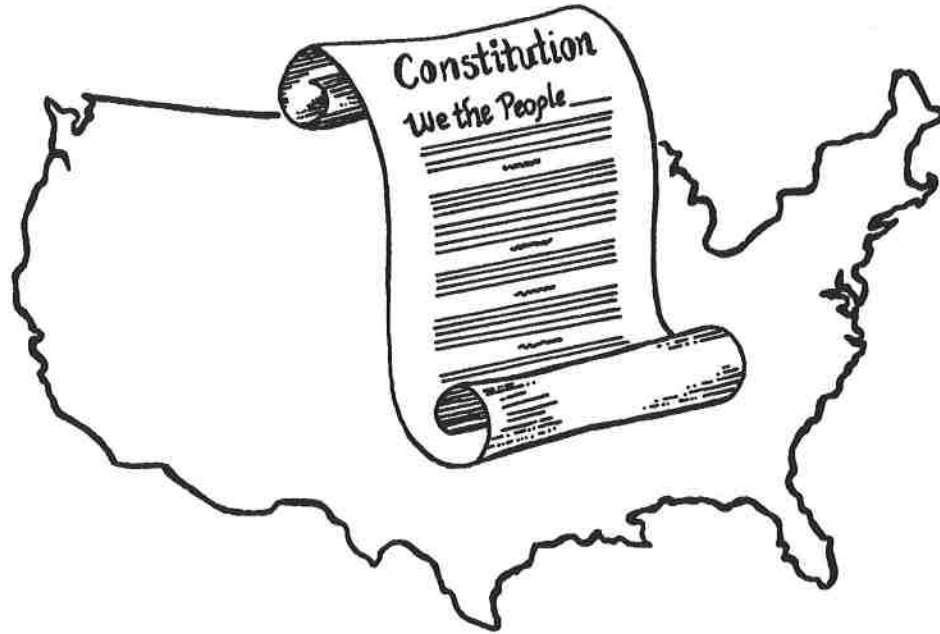
Crossroads Café (1996). Unit 19, "The People's Choice," and Unit 20, "Outside Looking In". A 26-part video series set in a neighborhood restaurant featuring real-world social and cultural issues. Videos and tape scripts available from Intelcom, (800) 576-2988, www.intelecom.org. Textbooks available from Heinle & Heinle, www.heinle.com. Videos may be used independently of textbooks.

* This list of resources is also located at www.thecenterweb.org (click on "The Adult Learning Resource Center") where it is updated annually.

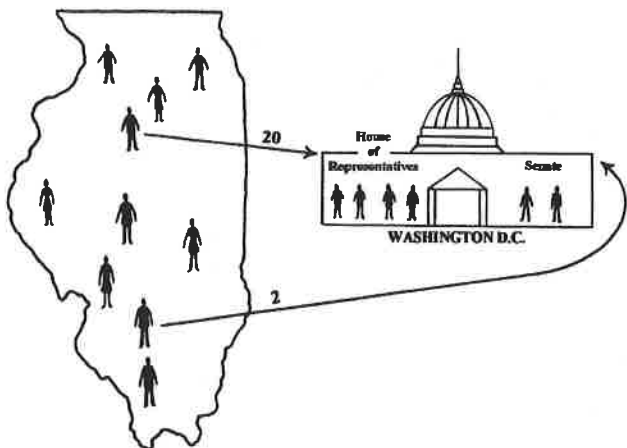
PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

U.S. Constitution



national government



state government



PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

President



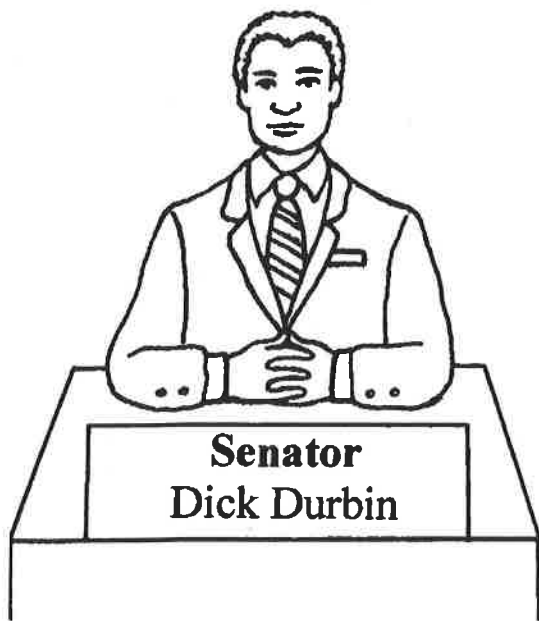
governor



PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

LEGISLATORS

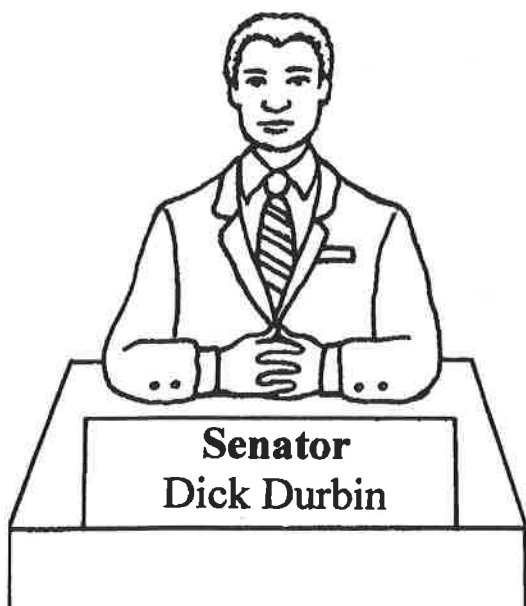
senator



representative



term of office



6 YEARS



2 YEARS

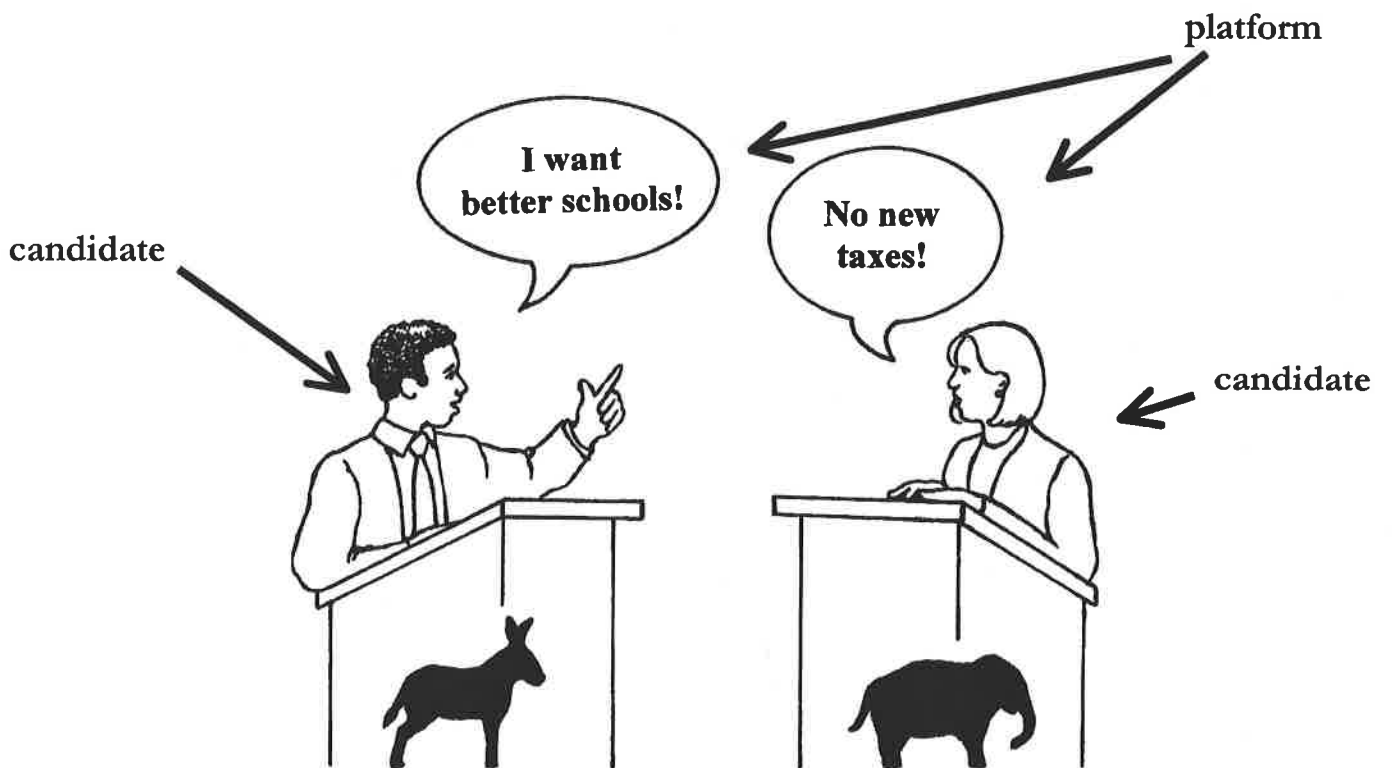
PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

POLITICAL PARTIES

Democrat



Republican



PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

campaign



election/voting



ballot

BALLOT	Punch One
CANDIDATES	
Julia Cuomo	●
Tom Burns	●
Martin Adamski	●
Sheila Rubin	●
Fred Smith	●

majority

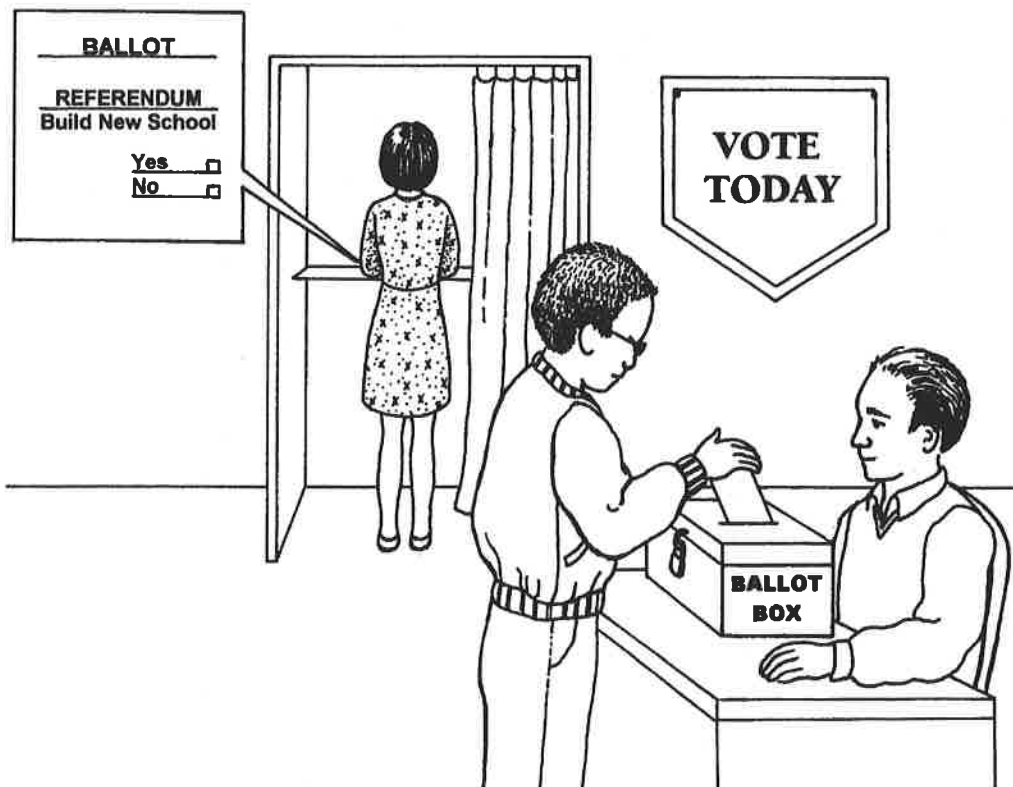
BALLOT	
CANDIDATES	
Julia Cuomo	12%
Tom Burns	63%
Martin Adamski	5%
Sheila Rubin	15%
Fred Smith	5%

PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

issues



referendum

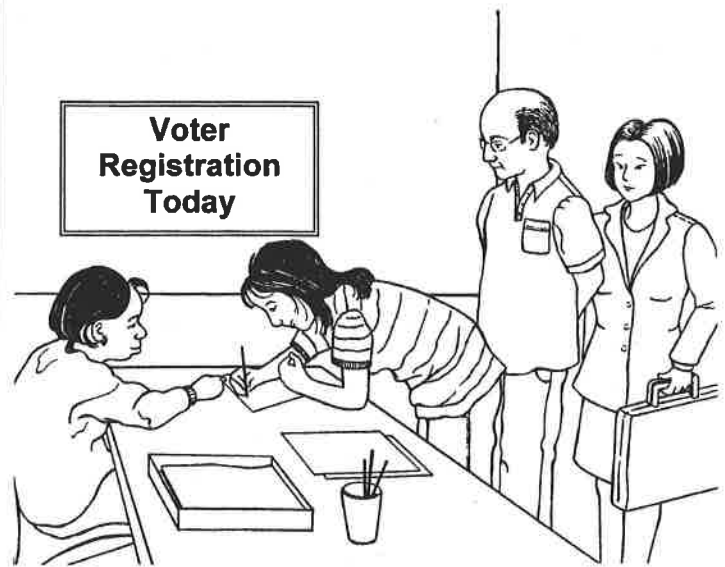


PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

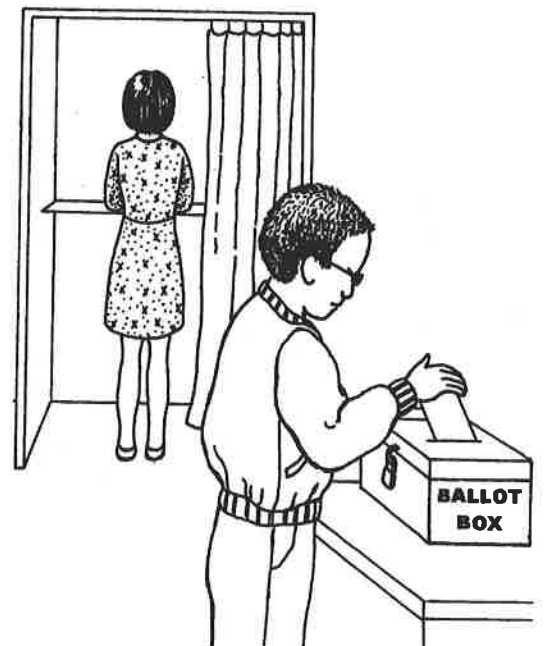
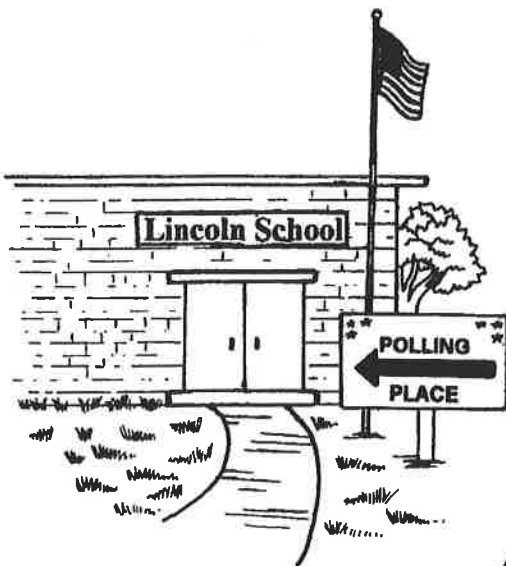
citizen



registered



polling place



PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

VOTING REQUIREMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

You must:

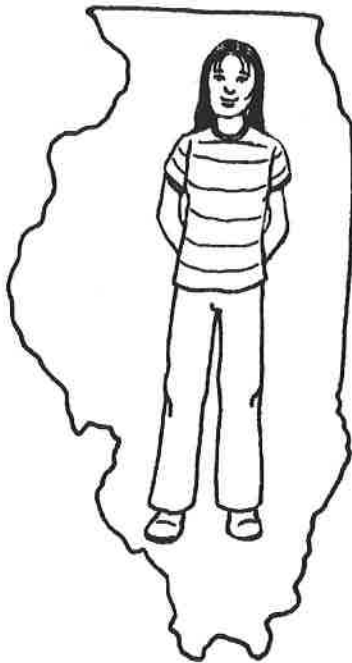
be a U. S. citizen



be at least 18 years old



live in your state for a certain amount of time



register to vote



READING PASSAGE 1: Pre-Reading Activity

Directions: Think about voting in your native country. Discuss the answers to the questions below with your classmates. (Optional: Write the answers to the questions.)

1. Do you vote for government leaders? If so, what leaders do you vote for?
2. Can all people vote? What are the requirements for voters?
3. Do most people vote in elections? How do they feel about the importance of voting?
4. How are candidates for government office selected?
5. How long do leaders stay in office? Can they be elected again?
6. How do people get information about candidates?

Now talk about this question with your classmates:

How are elections in the United States different from elections in your native country?

READING PASSAGE 1

The government of the United States is a representative democracy. The people elect representatives to act for them in daily government work. Government power is divided among national, state and local government.

THE RIGHT TO VOTE

The power of the government comes from the United States Constitution. The Constitution is the highest law of the land. This document gives citizens the right to vote. When people vote, they make decisions about leaders or issues.

Americans vote for their leaders in national, state, and local elections. They choose a President and Vice-President in the national election. They also vote for their U.S. senators and representatives. Senators and representatives are legislators, people who make laws. In state elections, people elect their governor, state legislators, and other officials. There are also local elections for community leaders and lawmakers.

People also vote on important issues. For example, in state or local elections people sometimes vote on referenda. A referendum is a question on the ballot for people to vote “yes” or “no.” Referenda can be about changes to the state or local government, taxes, or spending money on a special project. For example, voters in a school district may vote on building a new school. People vote “for” or “against” a referendum. If a majority of people votes “for,” the referendum becomes a law.

Not every American can vote. In order to vote, a person must be a citizen, at least 18 years old, and registered to vote. People must live in their state for a certain amount of time before voting. Some states have other requirements, too.

Most citizens think voting is an important right because they can elect their leaders. They vote for leaders who have the same ideas as they have. They want leaders who listen to their problems and work towards solutions. They want government to respond to their needs.

ELECTIONS

Major elections take place in even-numbered years. Every 4 years there is an election for President of the United States. State and local elections take place every 2 years. Elections usually take place in the fall or spring. People vote at their neighborhood polling place. This is usually a school, church, synagogue, or park building in the community.

Different government jobs have different terms of office. For example, a school board member may serve a 4-year term. State representatives usually serve a 2-year term. U.S. senators are elected for a 6-year term. If elected officials do a good job, voters usually re-elect them.

READING PASSAGE 1 continued

Before elections, political parties choose their candidates. Political parties are groups of people who share the same ideas about government. The major political parties are Democrat and Republican. There are also many smaller political parties that put candidates on the ballot. The parties help their candidates with campaigns. During campaigns, candidates identify and speak on important issues. They tell what changes they want to make in government. This is their party's platform.

Informed citizens know the candidates and their political parties. They get information about candidates from TV, newspapers, speeches, campaign literature, Internet web sites, and other people. They know the candidates' platforms or positions. Informed citizens know when, where, and how to vote. They also watch to see what leaders do after the election.

READING PASSAGE 1: Vocabulary Activity 1-A

Directions: Say these words after your teacher. Discuss the meaning of each word.
(Optional: Write the meaning next to each word.)

1. representative democracy
2. Constitution
3. election/voting
4. President
5. senator
6. representative
7. governor
8. legislator/lawmaker
9. issues
10. referendum/referenda (*plural*)
11. ballot
12. majority
13. citizen
14. registered
15. polling place
16. term of office
17. political party
18. candidate
19. campaign
20. platform

Other new words:

READING PASSAGE 1: Vocabulary Activity 1-B

Directions: Write the correct word or words in each sentence. Use the word bank for help. There are five extra words.

1. Citizens go to a _____ to vote.
2. The _____ is the chief executive of the state.
3. The major _____ are Democrat and Republican.
4. The candidates' names are put on the _____ for an election.
5. There is an _____ for President every 4 years.
6. The _____ is the highest law of the United States.
7. The candidate's _____ promised more money for education.
8. In a _____ type of government, people vote for their leaders.
9. The _____ for President is 4 years.
10. A _____ makes laws for the country, state, or community.
11. A citizen must be _____ to vote.
12. People vote "for" or "against" an issue on a _____.
13. A registered voter must be a _____.
14. Government leaders make decisions about important _____.
15. A U.S. _____ is elected for a 6-year term.

WORD BANK

representative democracy	platform	election	senator
governor	legislator	issues	referendum
ballot	majority	registered	polling place
term of office	political parties	candidate	campaign
representative	Constitution	President	citizen

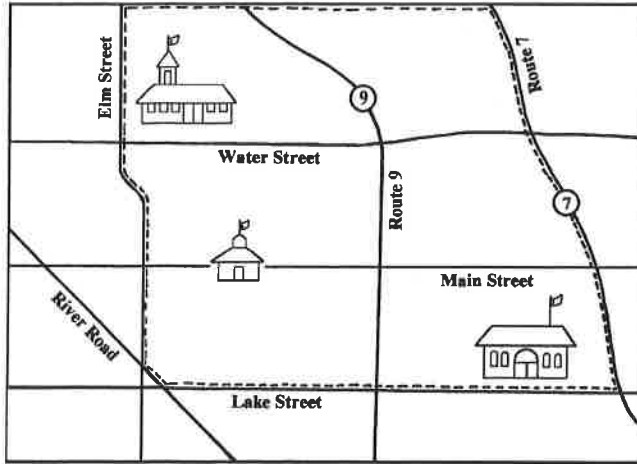
READING PASSAGE 1: Comprehension Check

Directions: Take turns reading each sentence below with a partner. Decide if each sentence is TRUE or FALSE. Put an X under TRUE or FALSE.
(Optional: Correct the false sentences.)

	TRUE	FALSE
1. The power of the government comes from the U.S. Constitution.	_____	_____
2. Americans vote for their leaders in local, state, and national elections.	_____	_____
3. In a referendum, people vote for their favorite candidate.	_____	_____
4. American citizens can vote at the age of 16.	_____	_____
5. Elections usually take place in the summer.	_____	_____
6. There is an election for President of the United States every 2 years.	_____	_____
7. All government jobs have the same terms of office.	_____	_____
8. The 2 major political parties are Democrat and Republican.	_____	_____
9. During campaigns, candidates tell the changes they want to make in government.	_____	_____
10. Citizens learn about candidates' positions from TV, speeches, Internet web sites, newspapers, campaign literature, and other people.	_____	_____

PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

school district



Superintendent



school board



PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

state



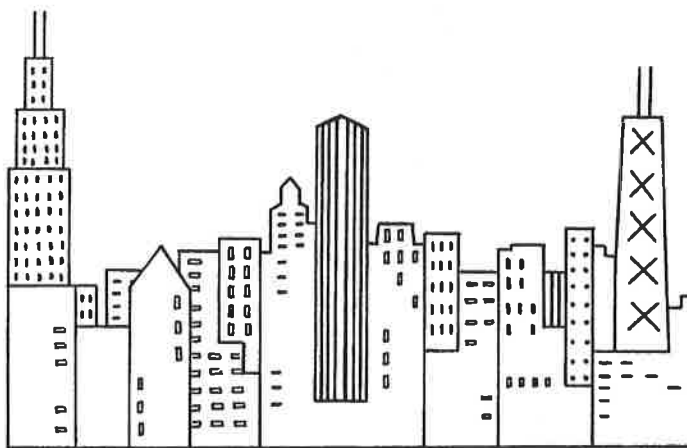
county



township



city



town/village



PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

ELECTED OFFICIALS – CHIEF EXECUTIVES

state



governor



township



supervisor



city/town/village



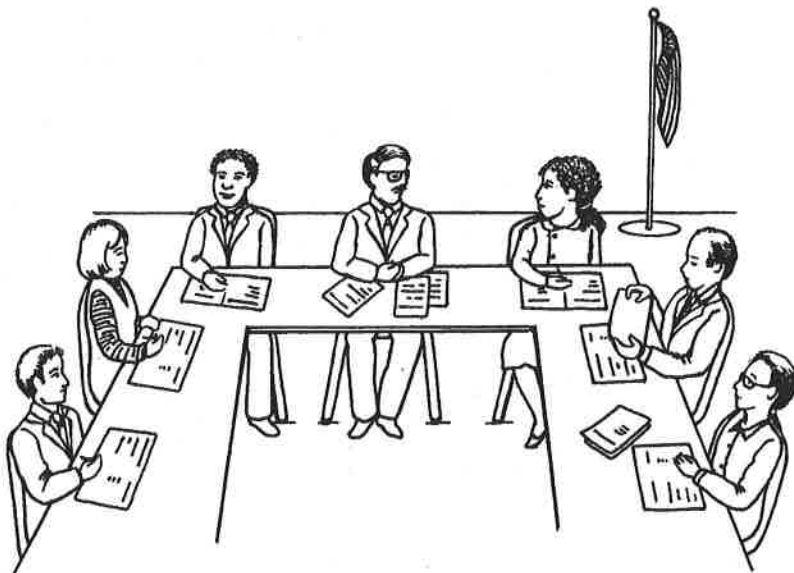
mayor/village president



PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

ELECTED OFFICIALS

city council/aldermen/trustees



ordinance



contract



PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

COMMUNITY SERVICES

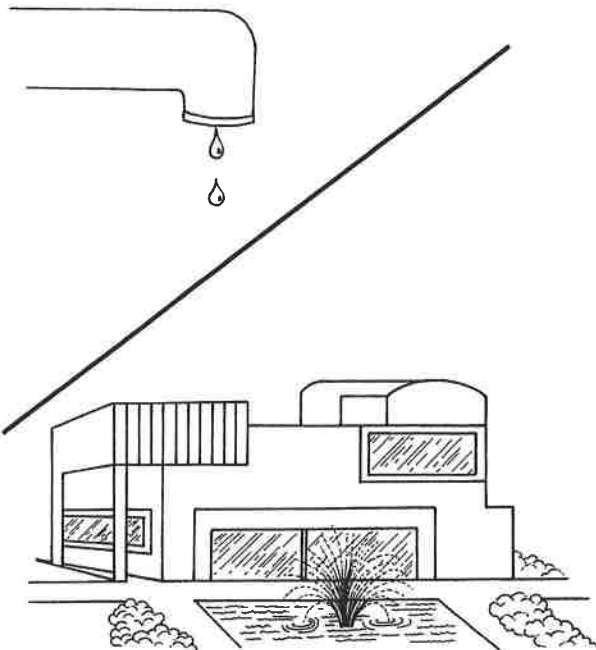
police



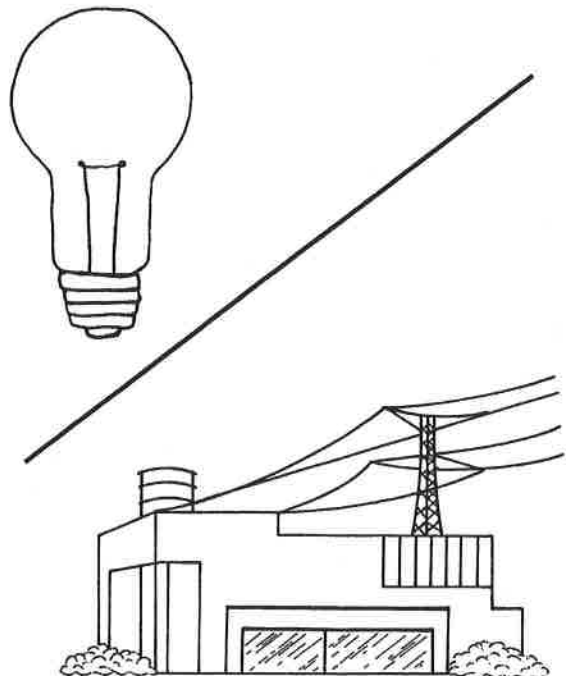
fire



water



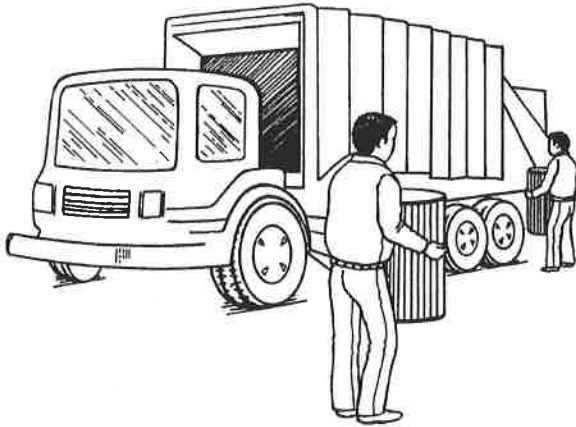
power (gas, electric)



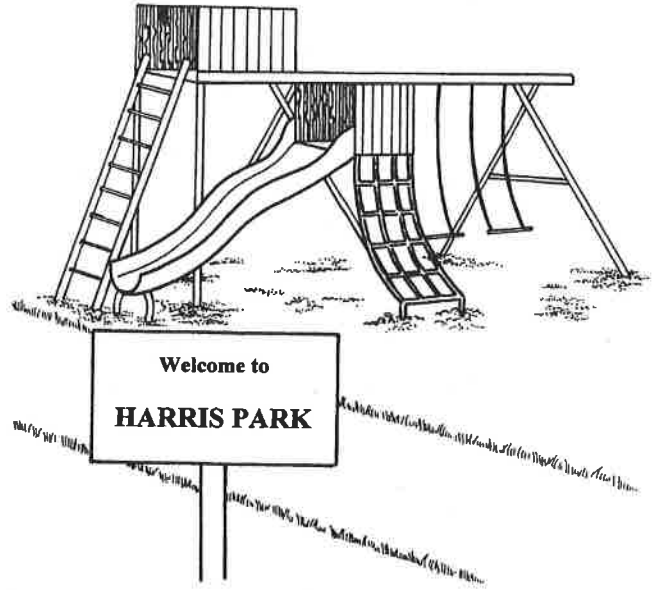
PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

COMMUNITY SERVICES

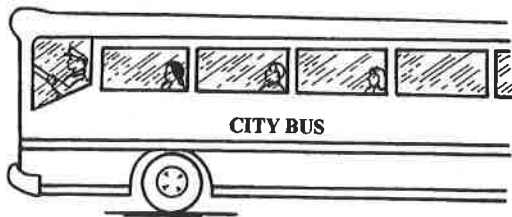
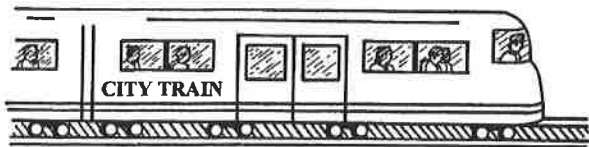
sanitation



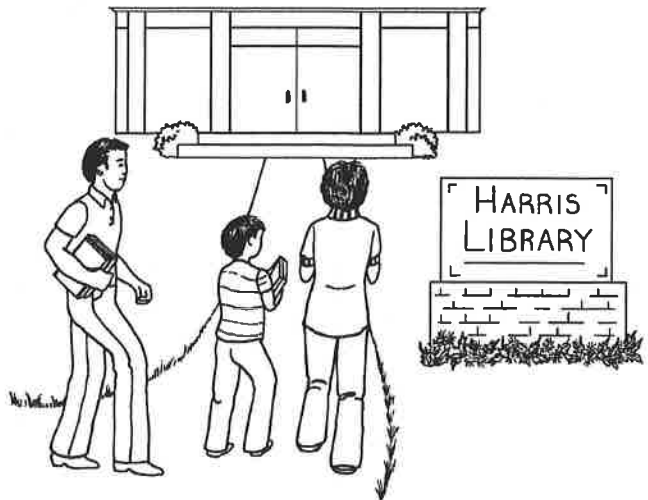
parks



transportation



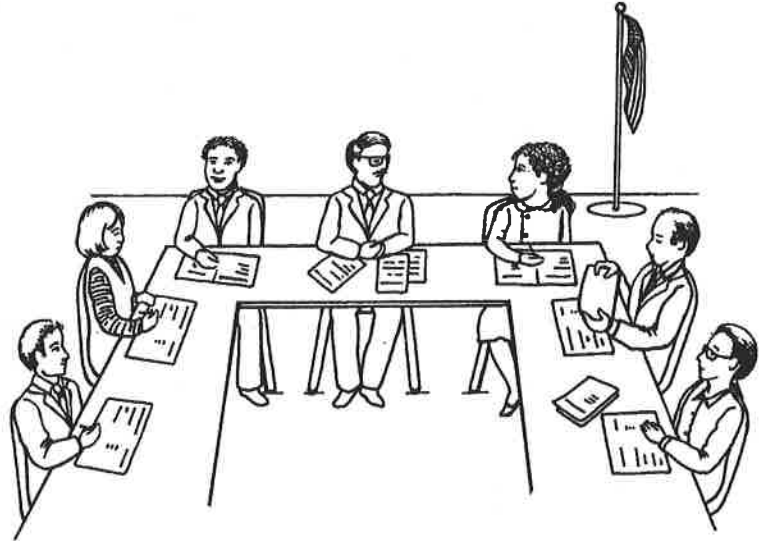
libraries



PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

COUNTY SERVICES

county board



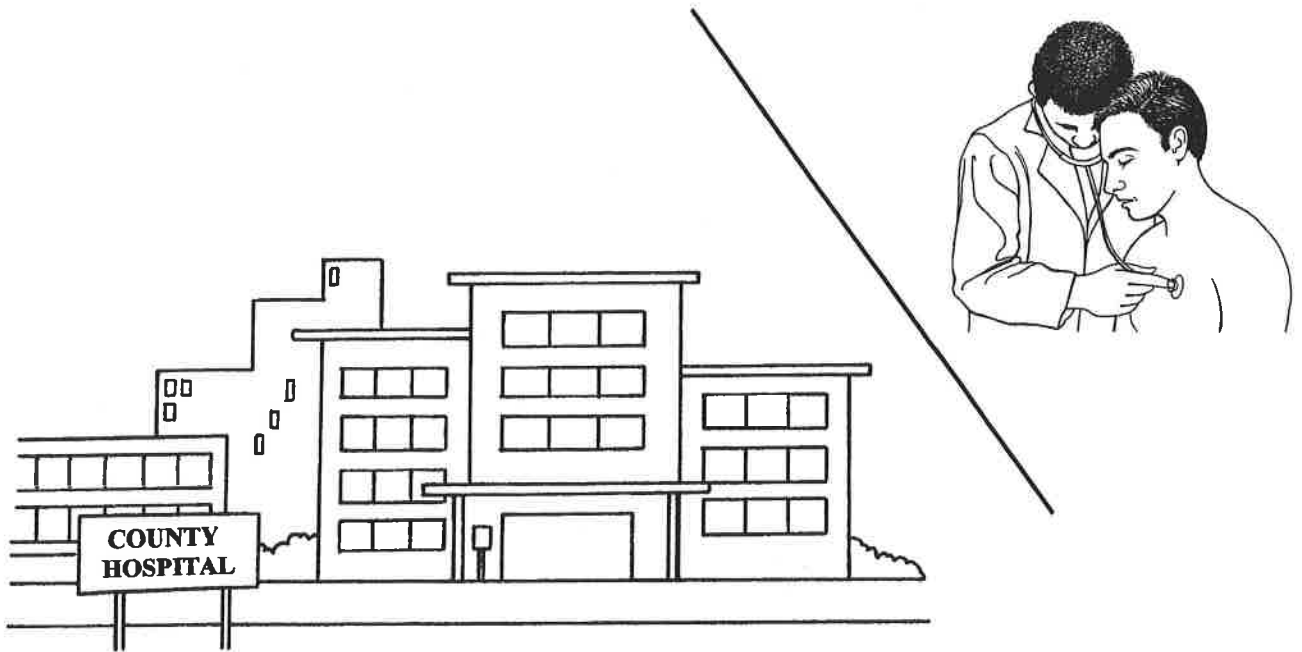
sheriff



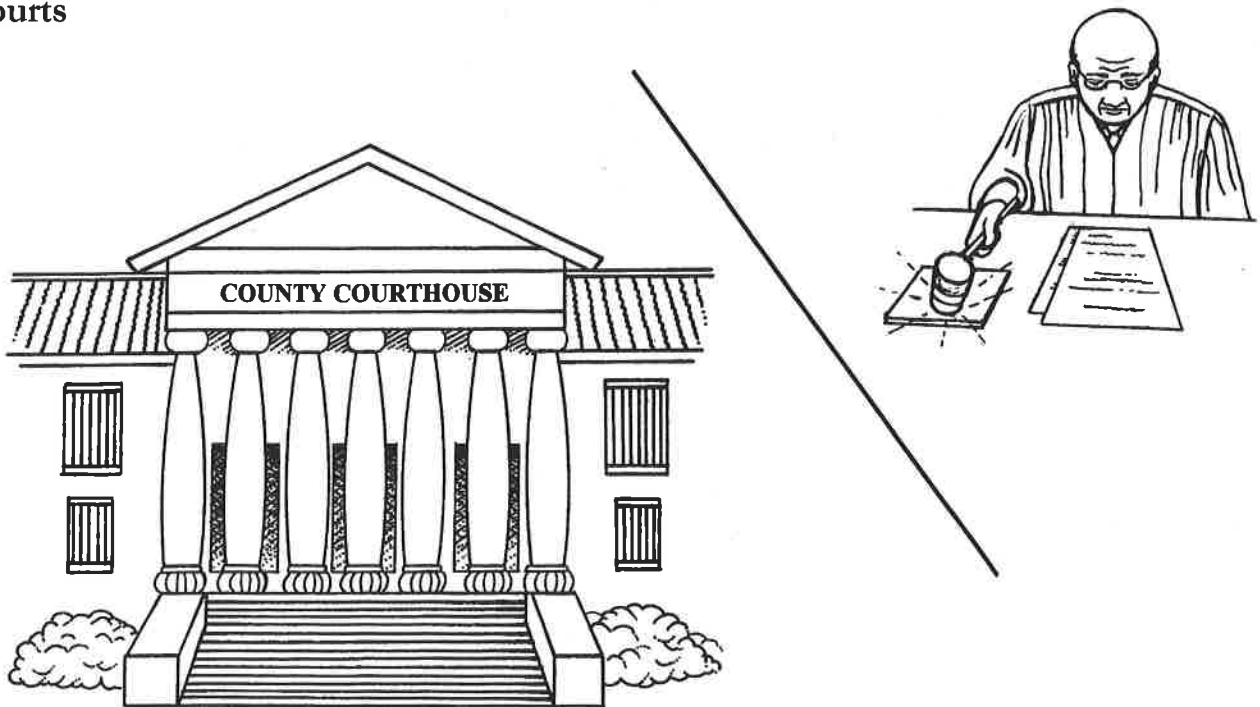
PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

COUNTY SERVICES

public health clinics/hospitals



courts



PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

STATE SERVICES

driver's license



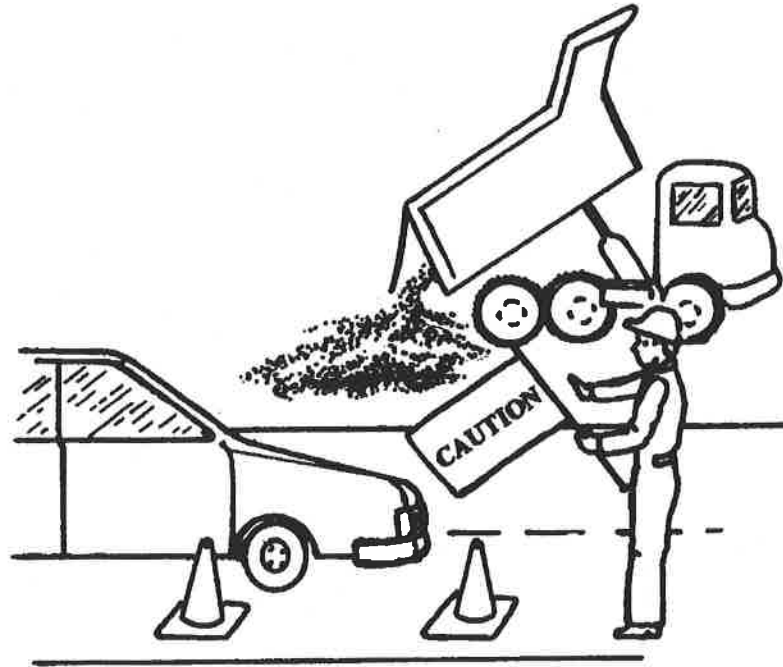
state lottery



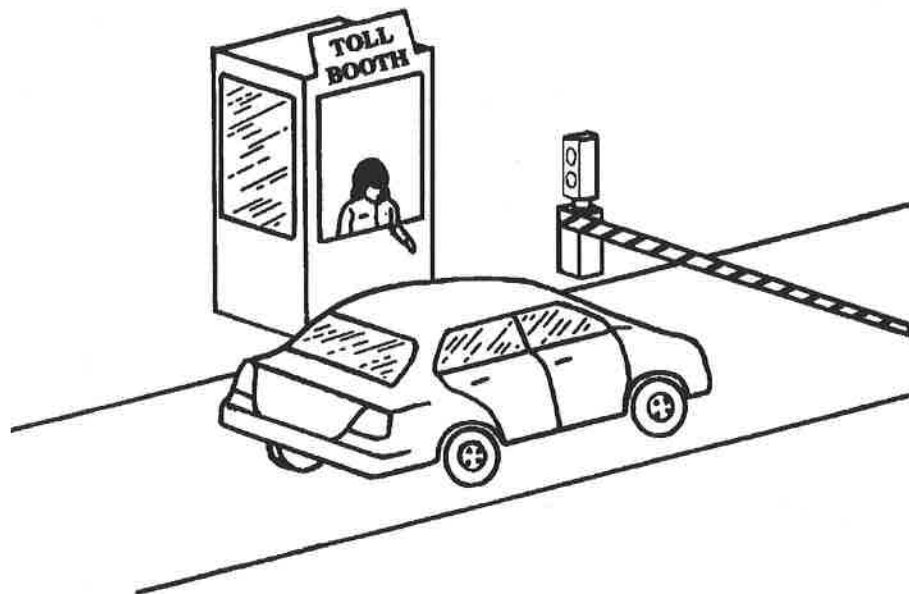
PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

STATE HIGHWAY SERVICES

highway repair



toll road



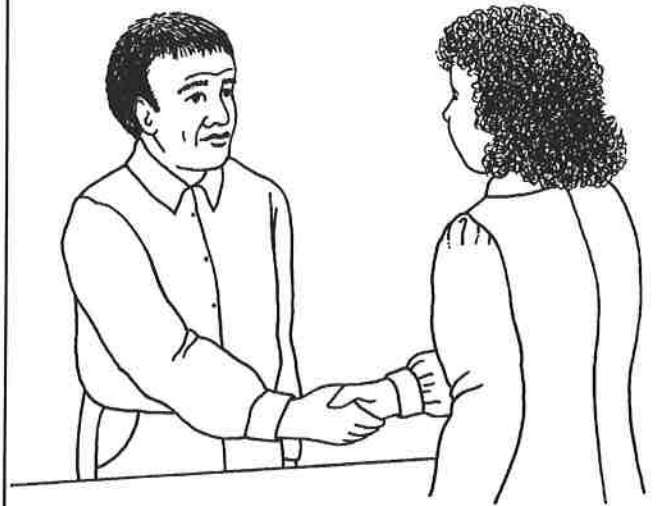
PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL OFFICIALS...

by telephone



in person



by letter

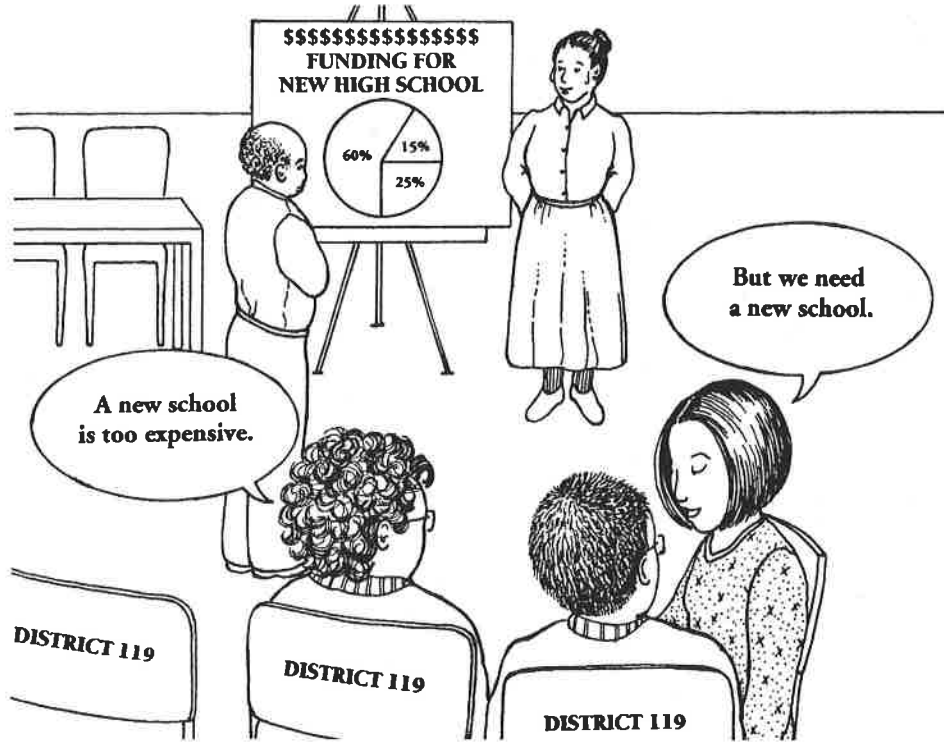


by email

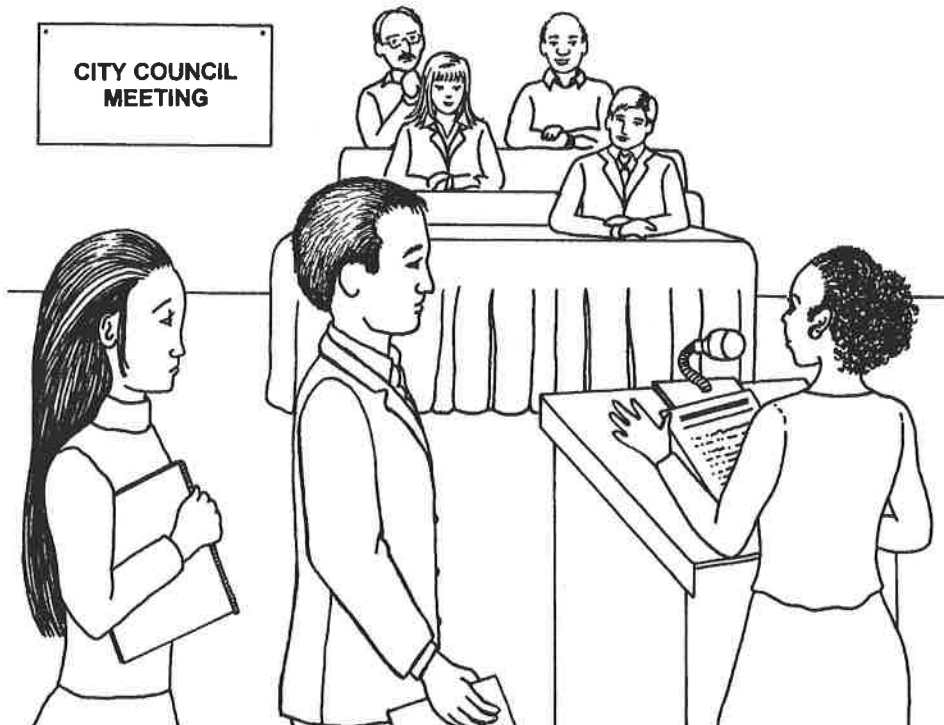


PICTURES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT continued

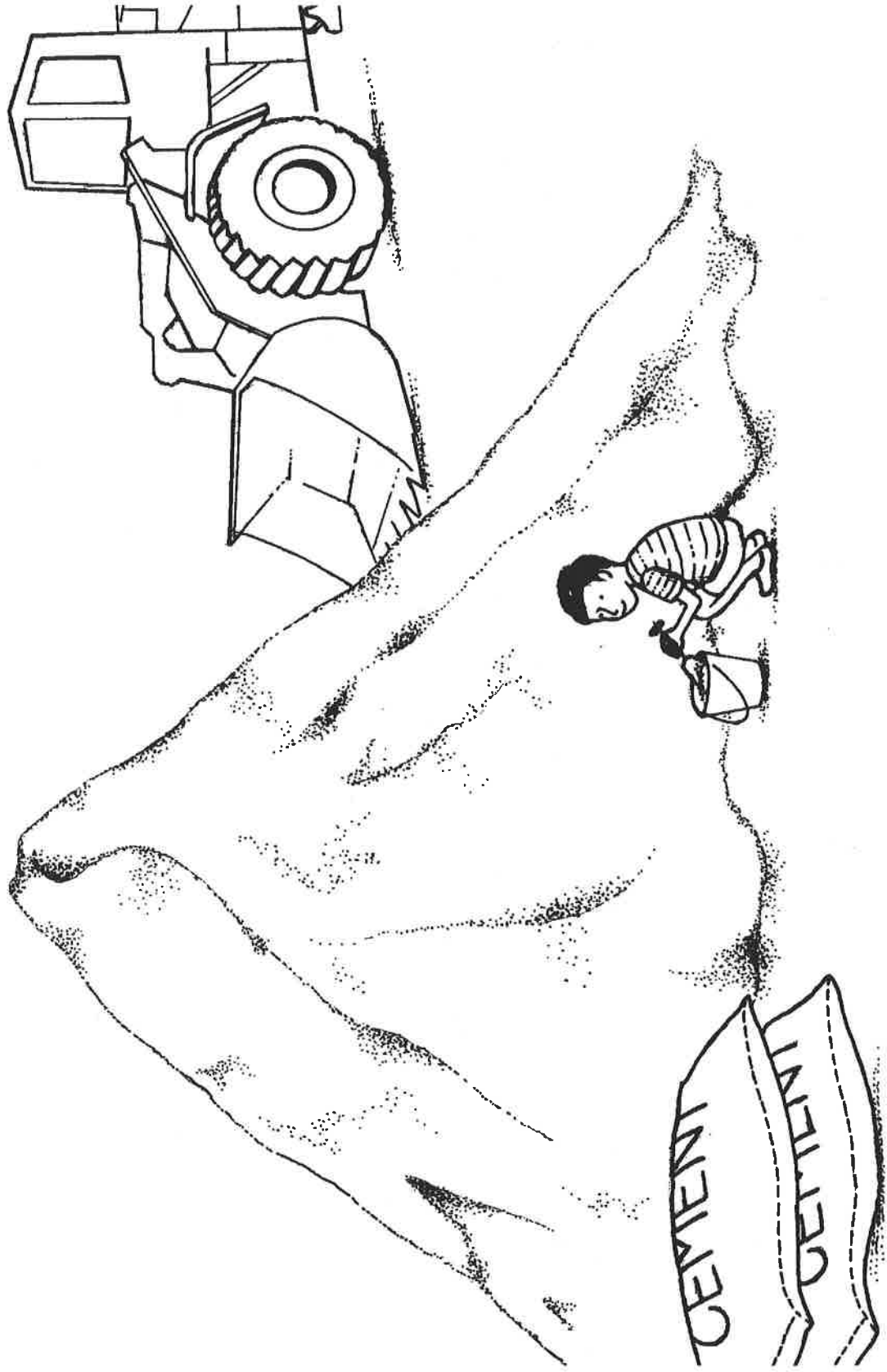
opinions



influence

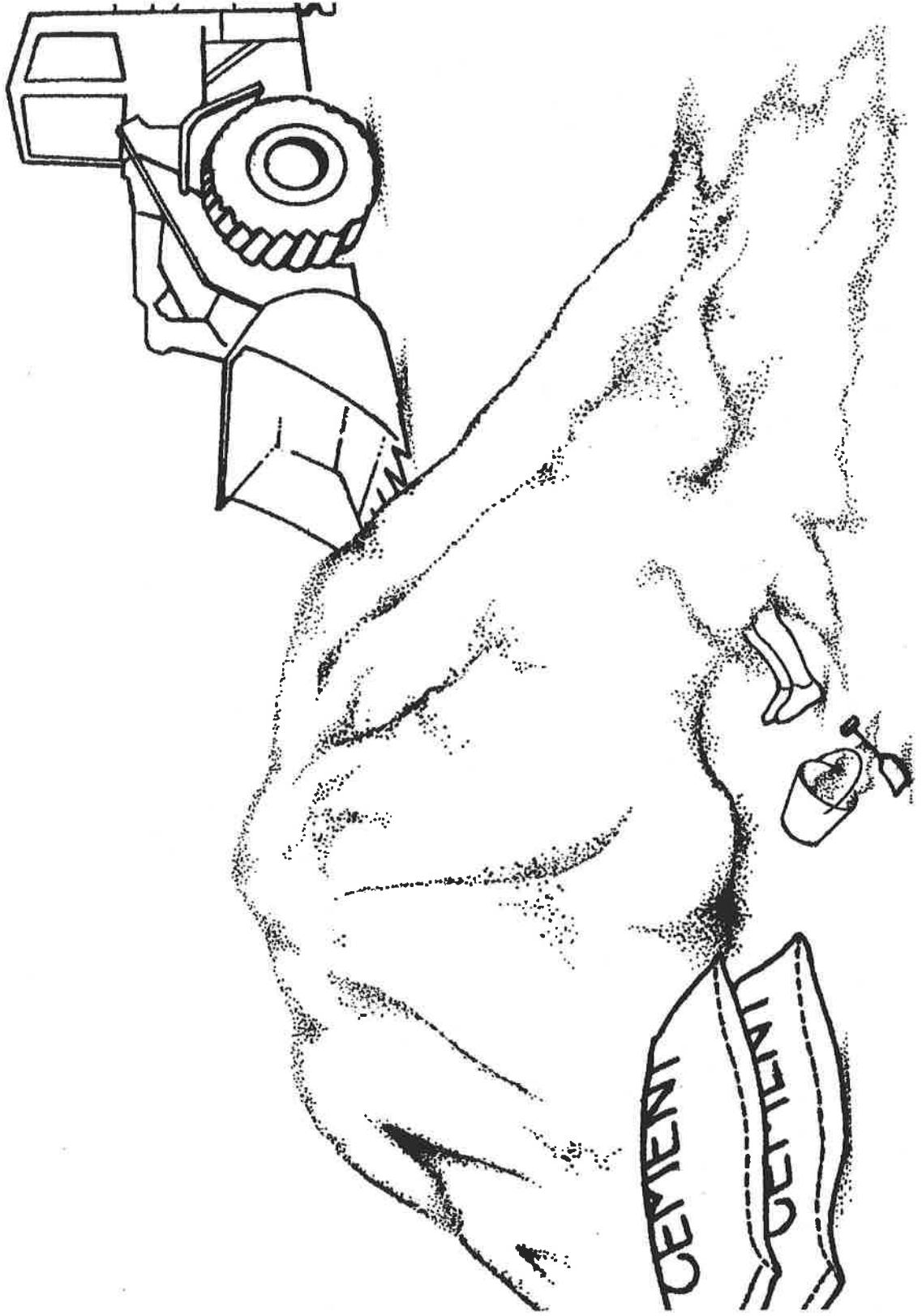


PICTURES FOR LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE



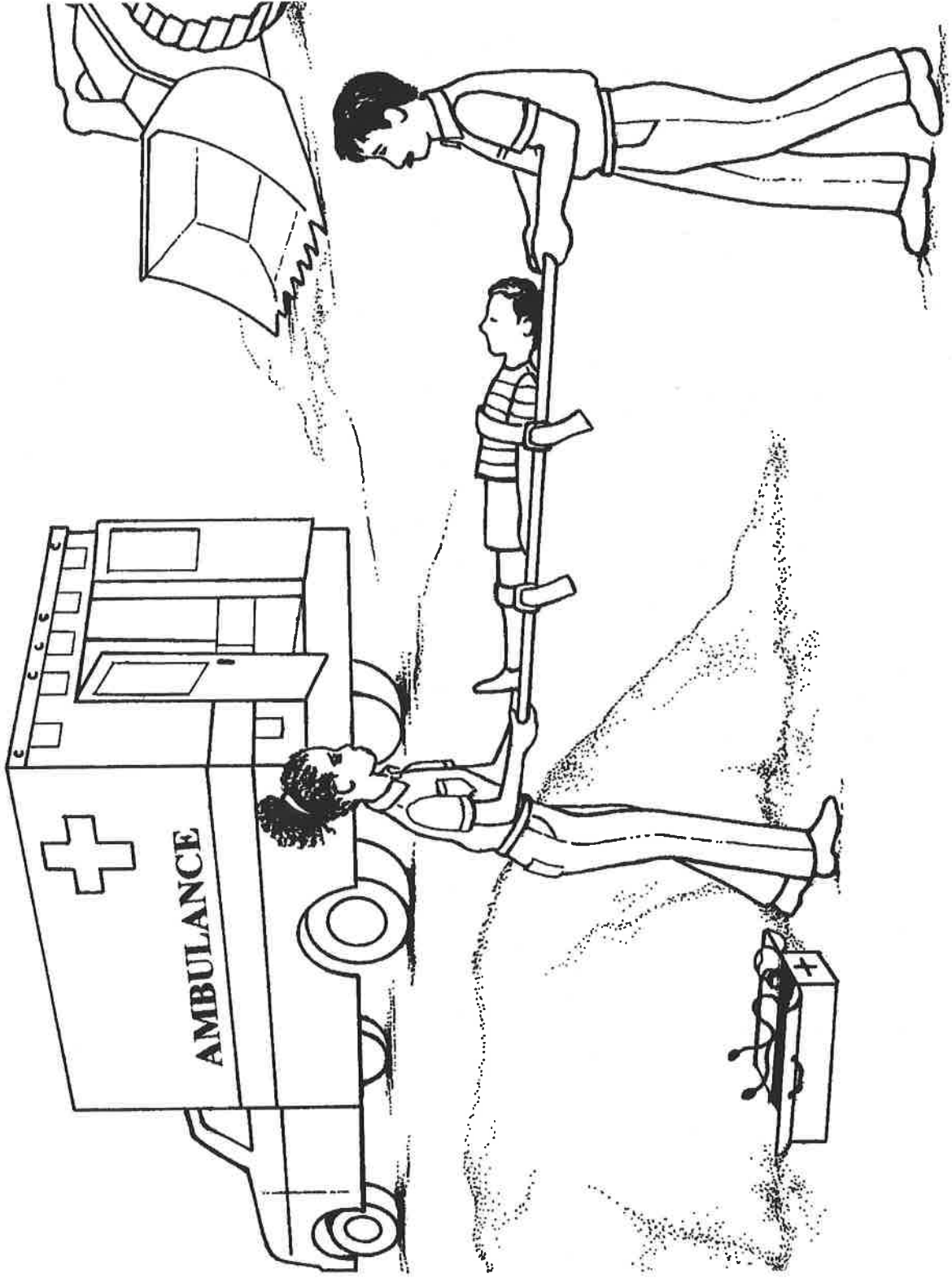
1

PICTURES FOR LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE continued



2

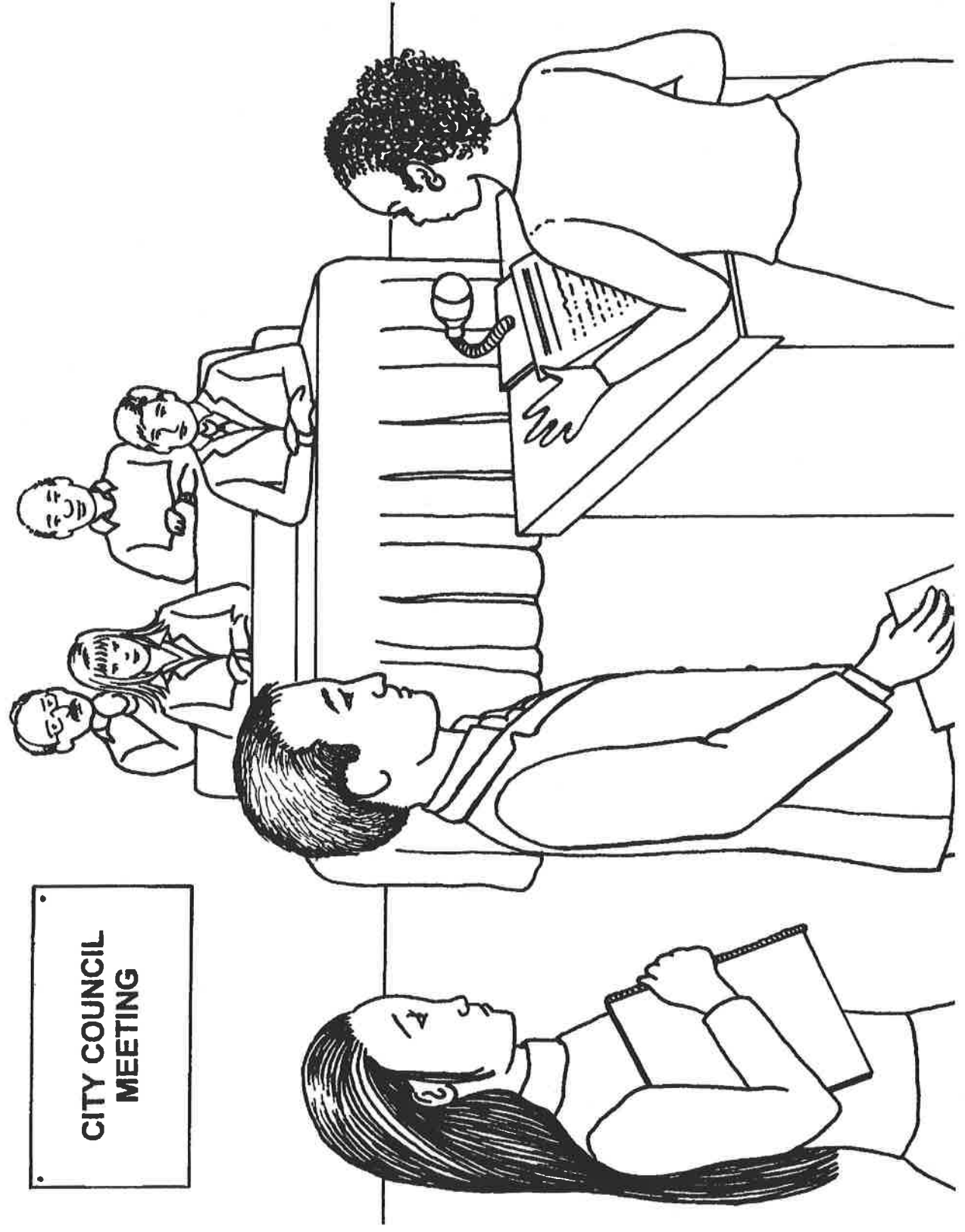
PICTURES FOR LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE continued



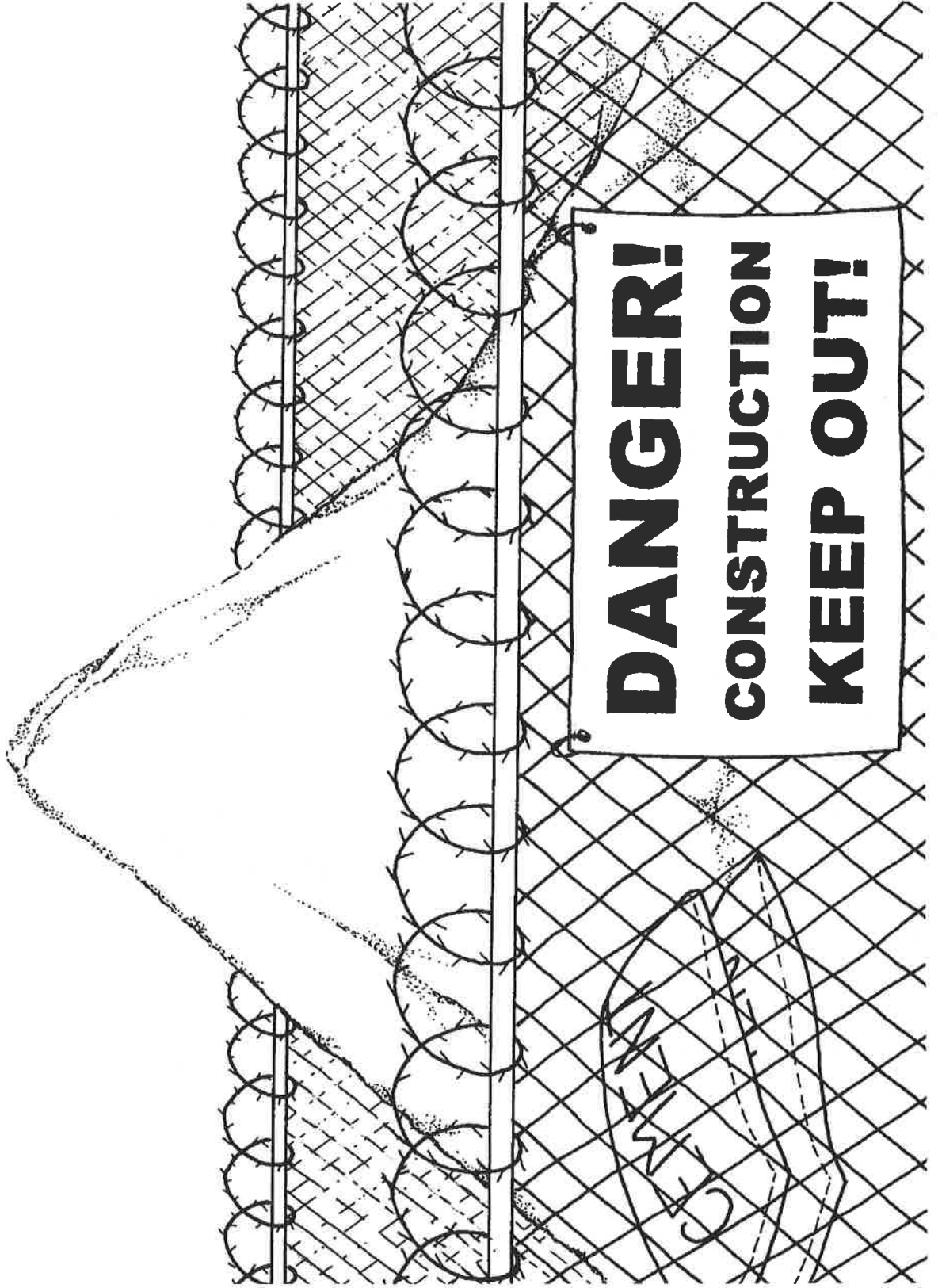
3

PICTURES FOR LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE continued

CITY COUNCIL MEETING



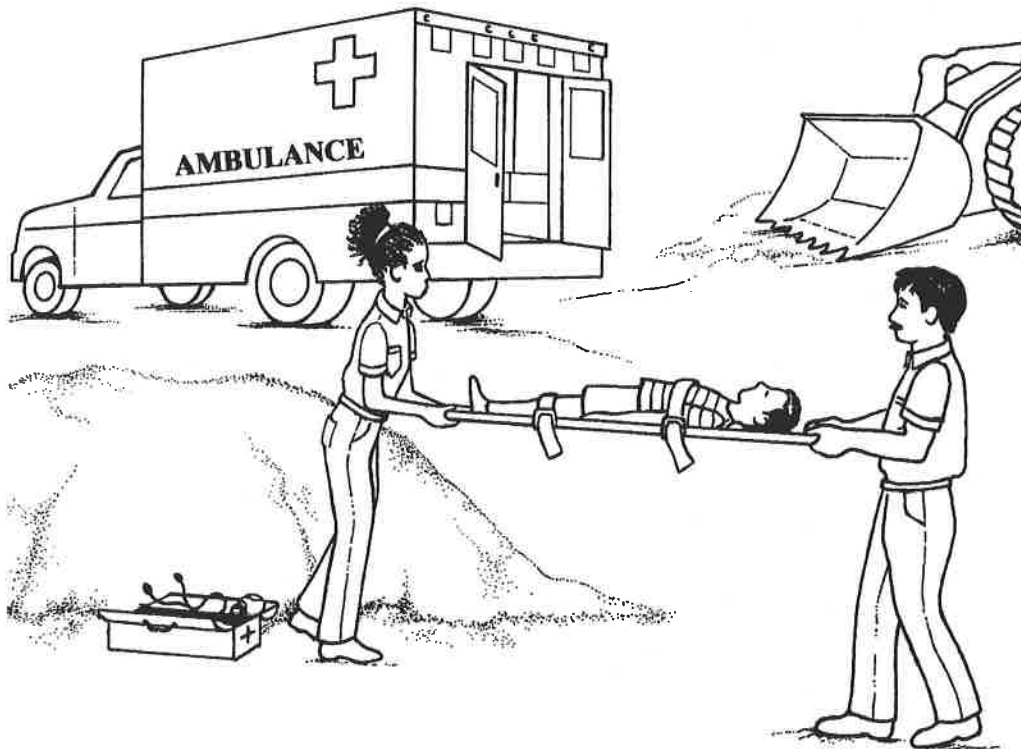
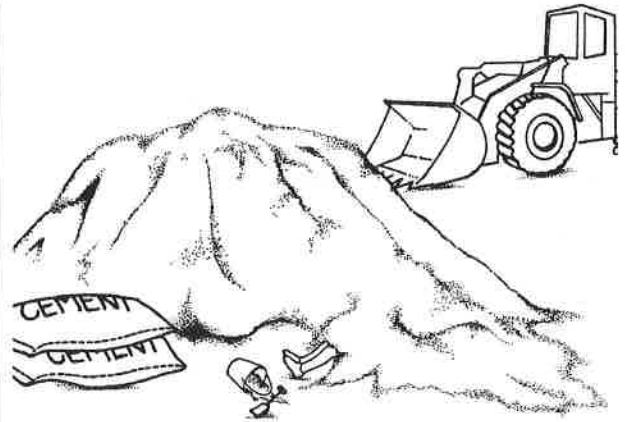
PICTURES FOR LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE continued



5

PICTURES FOR GROUP STORY WRITING

Directions: Work in groups of three or four. Write a story about the pictures below and on the next page. Write one or more sentences for each picture. Then share your story with the class.



PICTURES FOR GROUP STORY WRITING continued



4



5

READING PASSAGE 2: Pre-Reading Activity

Directions: Discuss the answers to the questions below with your classmates.
(Optional: Write the answers.)

1. Who are the elected leaders

- in your city or village?
- in your county?
- in your state?

What are their jobs?

2. Have you ever contacted a government leader? Why? What happened?

3. How can you become involved in the government of your community?

READING PASSAGE 2

Each state has smaller areas of local government. Local government areas include the school district, the community, and the county. In each of these areas citizens vote for their leaders. They can also contact these elected representatives with problems or questions.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

A school district is an area with one or more schools. The school board is in charge of schools in the district. People in the district vote for the local school board members. The school board makes important decisions for the school district, such as hiring the superintendent. The superintendent is the administrator of the school district. School board meetings are open to the public. Parents can contact board members about problems or with questions about the district or a local school.

COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT

Communities include cities, villages, towns, and townships. In each of these places, people vote for their local leaders. They elect a mayor, township supervisor, or village president as chief executive. People also elect a city council, a group of aldermen, or a number of trustees. These groups make laws called ordinances and decide important community issues. Sometimes these groups or the chief executive appoint a manager to help run the community.

There are also departments that provide services to people in the community. Some of these services are police, fire, water, power (electric/gas), sanitation, libraries, and parks. In larger cities, there may be other departments such as housing, transportation, and care of children and the elderly. The chief executive of the community usually appoints people to run these departments. But sometimes the chief executive gives contracts to private companies to provide these services. For example, the mayor might hire a company to remove trees in the city.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

The county is larger than a city and usually includes many cities. Its governing body is a county board. People elect board members to represent districts or the whole county. County government is responsible for many services such as the county courts, county health clinics and hospitals, and the sheriff's department.

STATE GOVERNMENT

State government is located in the state capital. The head of state government is the governor. People in the state vote for their governor every 4 years. They also elect members of the state legislature to make laws for the state. People in the districts vote for their own state senators and representatives. These elected officials live and have offices in the district they represent. There are also other elected officials in state government such as secretary of state, attorney general, and state treasurer.

READING PASSAGE 2 continued

The state government is responsible for drivers' licenses, the state highways, the state lottery, health and education, and many other important services.

CONTACTING ELECTED OFFICIALS

People elect state and local leaders and lawmakers to represent their community. The leaders' offices are open to the public. There are many ways for people to tell elected officials what they think about an issue. They can contact their officials in person, by telephone, letter, or email. Community members do not have to be citizens or registered voters to contact their leaders.

There are state and local meetings where officials listen to people's opinions. These meetings are open to the public. These government meetings are announced in the newspaper, on web sites, at libraries, and at other places. People go to these meetings to see legislators make laws and decide issues. There is usually an open time during community meetings for people to give their opinions.

HOW TO BECOME INVOLVED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

People can become involved in local government in many ways. They can read the community newsletter to learn about important issues. They can attend city council or school board meetings and speak out on the issues. People can work for candidates during campaigns. They can become citizens and vote in local elections. As citizens, they can also run for political office.

A TRUE STORY

An accident in an Illinois town shows how citizens can influence their leaders. A young boy was playing at a construction site. A large pile of sand fell on him and hurt him badly. Neighbors were upset and angry. They were also afraid that other children were in danger.

Some people sent email messages to the city council. Others called on the telephone to give their opinions. Many attended the city council meeting a few days after the accident. At the open part of the meeting, community members spoke out. They asked for immediate action by the lawmakers. The city council listened. It passed a new ordinance that said that all construction areas must have a fence around them.

This story shows the political power of community members. To bring change and improve community life, people must be involved.

READING PASSAGE 2: Vocabulary Activity 2-A

Directions: Say these words after your teacher. Discuss the meaning of each word.
(Optional: Write the meaning next to each word.)

1. school district
2. school board
3. superintendent
4. city/village/town
5. mayor/township supervisor/village president
6. chief executive
7. city council members/aldermen/trustees
8. ordinance
9. sanitation
10. contract
11. county
12. county board
13. courts
14. sheriff
15. contact
16. opinion
17. influence

Other new words:

READING PASSAGE 2: Vocabulary Activity 2-B

Directions: Write the letter of the definition on the line.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ 1. influence | a. the administrator of the school district |
| ___ 2. county | b. the elected leader of city government |
| ___ 3. school district | c. a law made by community government |
| ___ 4. contact | d. the county's police department |
| ___ 5. sanitation | e. to change other people's ideas or actions |
| ___ 6. city council/aldermen/
trustees | f. to communicate with someone by phone, email, or in person |
| ___ 7. contract | g. lawmakers for city government |
| ___ 8. chief executive | h. an elected group that makes decisions for a school district |
| ___ 9. ordinance | i. a written agreement to do something |
| ___ 10. mayor | j. garbage collection |
| ___ 11. village | k. an area with one or more schools and a school board |
| ___ 12. school board | l. the highest leader of community, county, or state government |
| ___ 13. superintendent | m. a town or small city |
| ___ 14. county board | n. places for trials or law cases |
| ___ 15. opinion | o. a person's belief or idea about something |
| ___ 16. courts | p. an elected group of county leaders |
| ___ 17. sheriff's department | q. the largest local governing body of a state |

READING PASSAGE 2: Comprehension Check

Directions: Take turns reading each sentence with a partner. Decide if each sentence is TRUE or FALSE. Put an X under TRUE or FALSE. (Optional: Correct the false sentences.)

	TRUE	FALSE
1. Local government includes the school district, the community, the county and the state.	_____	_____
2. In the school district, the school board hires the superintendent.	_____	_____
3. The chief executive of the community can be a mayor, village president or township supervisor.	_____	_____
4. Aldermen or trustees can make laws for the community.	_____	_____
5. The sheriff's department and the courts are part of county government.	_____	_____
6. People elect members of the state legislature to make laws for their city.	_____	_____
7. Secretary of state and state treasurer are not elected offices.	_____	_____
8. People can contact their officials only by letter.	_____	_____
9. Only citizens can contact elected state and local leaders.	_____	_____
10. There is no time during community meetings for people to give their opinions.	_____	_____
11. Community members can attend school board meetings to speak out on important issues.	_____	_____
12. Only citizens can run for political office.	_____	_____

DIALOGUE 1: Calling for Alderman's Office Hours

Directions: Listen to the dialogue. Then practice the dialogue with your teacher and classmates.

Tomás Cintado wants to go to his alderman's office. He calls to find out the office hours.

Secretary: Good morning, Alderman Hansen's office.

Tomás: Good morning. Could you tell me your office hours?

Secretary: We're open Monday through Friday from 9 to 5.

Tomás: Monday through Friday from 9 to 5?

Secretary: Yes.

Tomás: Thank you. Goodbye.

Secretary: You're welcome. Bye.

DIALOGUE 2: Calling About a School Board Meeting

Directions: Listen to the dialogue. Then practice the dialogue with your teacher and classmates.

Anna Pulaski wants to go to a school board meeting. She calls the school district for information.

Secretary: Hello. This is District 89.

Anna: Good morning. I'm calling for information about the school board meeting.

Secretary: Yes?

Anna: When is the next meeting?

Secretary: Next Tuesday evening, September 5 at 7:30.

Anna: Where will the meeting be?

Secretary: It's at Franklin School in the gym.

Anna: Oh. Where's Franklin School?

Secretary: It's at the corner of Potter and Maple by Woodland Park.

Anna: OK. Thank you for your help.

Secretary: You're welcome. Goodbye.

Anna: Goodbye.

DIALOGUE 3: Calling Your Senator

Directions: Listen to the dialogue. Then practice the dialogue with your teacher and classmates.

Joon Lee calls his state senator. He wants to influence Senator Hunter's vote on a bill in the senate. He calls the Senator's office to give his opinion.

Receptionist: Good morning, Senator Paul Hunter's office.

Joon: Hi. My name is Joon Lee. I live in Senator Hunter's district.

Receptionist: Yes. How may I help you?

Joon: I am calling to ask Senator Hunter to vote for Senate Bill 550. We need stronger gun control laws.

Receptionist: Okay. I will let the Senator know. Can you give me your address?

Joon: 101 Birch Street in Rockford.

Receptionist: Okay. Goodbye.

Joon: Thank you. Goodbye.

DIALOGUE 4: Calling City Hall

Directions: Listen to the dialogue. Then practice the dialogue with your teacher and classmates.

A community resident wants to attend a city council meeting. He calls City Hall for information.

Clerk: Good morning. City Hall.

Resident: Hello. My name is _____. I'm calling about the city council meeting.

Clerk: Yes. How can I help you?

Resident: Could you tell me _____?

Clerk: Sure. _____ Is there anything else?

Resident: No. Thanks for your help. Goodbye.

Clerk: Goodbye.

Partner A (Resident)	Partner B (Clerk)
1. when the next city council meeting is	1. Next Monday. The council meets the 1 st and 3 rd Mondays of each month.
2. what time the city council meets	2. 8:00 p.m.
3. where the city council meets	3. At City Hall on the 2 nd floor
4. if there is time during the meeting to speak about a problem	4. Yes. After the agenda items there is an open time for people to speak to the council.

ACTION RESEARCH ACTIVITY: Elected Leaders Chart

Directions: Write the names of your national, state, and community leaders in the chart below.

NATIONAL LEADERS	STATE LEADERS	COMMUNITY LEADERS
<u>United States</u> Country	_____ State	_____ County
_____ President	_____ Governor	_____ City/Village/Township <i>(circle one)</i>
_____ U.S. Senator	_____ State Senator	_____ Mayor/Village President/Township Supervisor <i>(circle one)</i>
_____ U.S. Senator	_____ State Representative	_____ Alderman/Trustee/City Council Member <i>(circle one)</i>
_____ U.S. Representative		

WRITING ACTIVITY: Contacting Your Local Officials

Directions: Mrs. Ramírez is worried about the safety of her daughter María at school. She writes a letter to the mayor to tell him about the problem. Read this note.

1920 Diversey Avenue
 Hometown, Illinois 63256
 September 15, 2003

Dear Mayor Robertson,

My daughter is a student at Garfield High School. She is a good student and wants to play basketball on the school team. But there is a big problem with gangs. They threaten the students who play sports after school. My daughter is afraid to leave the building after practice.

I think we need more police around the school. They can protect students from the gangs. Policemen will keep the students safe so they can play sports. Please help our community fight the gangs.

Sincerely,
Esther Ramirez

Now write a note to your mayor. Tell about a problem in your community.

_____ ,

PAIR ACTIVITY: Understanding State & Local Government

Directions: With a partner, read each decision below. Decide if it is a state decision or a local decision. Write **S** or **L** on each line.

S = a state decision

L = a local decision

- _____ 1. Put up a stop sign on Washington Street at Greenwood Avenue.
- _____ 2. Change the curfew for teenagers under 18 to 11:30 p.m.
- _____ 3. Put parking meters on Monroe Street.
- _____ 4. Raise state income taxes.
- _____ 5. Hire another bilingual teacher at Emerson School.
- _____ 6. Raise the water rates in the city. (higher water bills)
- _____ 7. Add new playground equipment in the city parks.
- _____ 8. Raise the tolls on the interstate highway.
- _____ 9. Not allow residents to walk their dogs in the park.
- _____ 10. Add a new game to the state lottery.

Discuss each example with your class. Can you add other examples of issues decided by state or local government?

CULTURAL COMPARISON ACTIVITY: The Democratic Process

Directions: Think about voting and participating in state and local government in your native country and in the United States. Discuss the answers to the questions below with your classmates. (Optional: Write the information in the chart.)

	IN _____ (native country)	IN THE U.S.
1. Do people vote for government leaders? Which ones?		
2. Do candidates campaign for government offices? How do people get information about candidates?		
3. Who makes important decisions about the schools? Are there school districts and school boards?		
4. What services does community government provide?		
5. Can people contact their state and local government leaders? How?		
6. Can people attend legislative meetings and give their opinions?		
7. How can people become involved in community government?		

EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES

As a class, identify an important issue that affects the group. Some ideas are:

- neighborhood crime
- local gangs
- racial profiling
- an overcrowded school
- a traffic or parking problem
- a safety issue
- insufficient public transportation
- public housing concerns
- re-districting in the school district
- busing students
- community health or welfare issues
- problems with a neighborhood business
- voter registration

Determine the best course of action from the suggestions below or have students generate their own plan of action. Choose an activity requiring a response by a government leader or one of his/her staff. Also select an activity in which students have a vested interest so that they will follow through to a satisfactory conclusion.

1. Attend a school board meeting, village council meeting, or local hearing on a subject of interest to students.
risk: low
language level: all
2. Take a field trip to the precinct office or local polling place. Pick up (or ask for) sample voter registration cards and other materials, if available.
risk: low-medium
language level: all
3. Visit Congressional local offices. Before the trip, have the class do research on bills that have been introduced in this session. At the district office, identify the number of a bill, get a copy and an update on its status, and find out how legislators voted.
risk: medium-high
language level: high beginning-advanced
4. Use a voting "machine" in class. Before practicing, get names of actual candidates, their parties, and their platforms so you can have a mock election.
risk: low
language level: all
5. Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper or to a school board member on an issue of interest to students.
risk: low-medium
language level: intermediate-advanced
6. Attend a candidate forum. Before going, have the class become familiar with their platforms or positions on important issues.
risk: low
language level: all

EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES continued

7. Invite a guest speaker to the class. Possibilities include a state representative, an alderman or trustee, or a candidate for local elected office. Have students prepare questions for the speaker before the event.
risk: medium-high
language level: high beginning-advanced

8. Have students access the web site for your state government. Find out the names of your elected officials. Get the mail and email addresses for the legislators in students' districts. Have students send messages stating their opinions of the legislator's stand on an issue.
risk: low
language level: intermediate-advanced

9. Have students access the web site for your community. Get information regarding elected leaders, the model of your community government, city departments, meetings, etc.
risk: low
language level: intermediate-advanced

10. Have students contact a local official by mail or email about a problem in the community and give their opinion on how to solve it.
risk: low
language level: intermediate-advanced