Name: _____ Date: _____

Town Meeting Night in a Small Town

Circle group

In some small towns, the big choices are not made by a mayor. They are made at a town meeting. The meeting is held in a gym or a town hall. Any voter who comes can help decide.

Before the night, the town prints a booklet called a warrant. It lists the questions to be settled. Some are plain, like how much to spend on plowing roads. Some are new, like whether to buy a field for a park.

A moderator runs the meeting. This person gives each speaker a turn. The moderator keeps the group on one topic at a time.

Any registered voter can stand up and talk. Voters often vote by voice or by holding up a card. If the vote is close, the moderator can count.

There is one problem. Only people who come that night get a say. In a town of thousands, only a few hundred may show up. Some towns offer childcare to help. Fans of the meeting say it is worth it. Neighbors hear each other before they vote.

Questions

1. What is the booklet of questions for voters called?

_____

_____

2. What does the moderator do?

_____

_____

3. Who can speak and vote at the meeting?

_____

_____

4. What is one problem with town meetings?

_____

_____

5. Why would a town offer childcare at the meeting?

_____

_____

6. Why is a town meeting a direct democracy?

_____

_____

Words to know

warrant: the printed list of questions a town meeting will vote on
moderator: the person who leads a meeting and keeps it fair and orderly
registered: officially signed up on the list of people allowed to vote

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Town Meeting Night in a Small Town

Triangle group

In many small New England towns, the biggest decisions of the year are not made by a mayor or a council. They are made in a school gym or a town hall on a single evening, by whoever decides to show up. This gathering is called a town meeting, and it is one of the oldest examples of direct democracy still in use in the United States.

Before the meeting, the town prints a booklet called a warrant, which lists every question the voters will settle. Some items are routine, such as how much money to spend on plowing the roads. Others are unusual, such as whether to buy a field for a new park. A person chosen as the moderator runs the meeting, making sure that each speaker gets a turn and that the group discusses only one topic at a time.

Any registered voter may stand up, ask a question, and speak for or against an article on the warrant. Votes are often taken by voice or by raising a colored card, and if the result is close, the moderator may ask for a careful count. Neighbors who disagree during the debate still live on the same roads afterward, so most speakers try to be respectful.

Town meetings have a weakness. Only people who can attend on that particular night have a say, so a town of several thousand residents may see just a few hundred voters. Some towns try to help by offering childcare or by holding the meeting on a weekend. Supporters believe the effort is worthwhile, because citizens hear each other's reasons face to face before they decide.

Questions

1. What is the booklet that lists the questions voters will decide called?

_____

_____

2. What does the moderator do at a town meeting?

_____

_____

3. Who is allowed to speak and vote on an article?

_____

_____

4. What is one weakness of town meetings?

_____

_____

5. Why might a town offer childcare during the meeting?

_____

_____

6. Why is a town meeting called direct democracy?

_____

_____

Words to know

democracy: a way of governing in which the people make the decisions
warrant: the printed list of questions a town meeting will vote on
moderator: the person who leads a meeting and keeps it fair and orderly
article: one separate item or question on a list to be voted on
registered: officially signed up on the list of people allowed to vote

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Town Meeting Night in a Small Town

Square group

In numerous small New England towns, the most consequential decisions of the year are made not by a mayor or an elected council but by the residents themselves, who assemble in a school gymnasium or a town hall on one evening. This tradition, known as the town meeting, remains among the oldest examples of direct democracy still practiced in the United States.

Ahead of the gathering, the town distributes a booklet called a warrant, which enumerates every question that the voters will resolve. Certain items are routine, such as the amount of money to set aside for plowing the roads, while others are far more unusual, such as whether the town should purchase a field in order to create a new park. A person selected as moderator presides over the proceedings, ensuring that every speaker receives a turn and that the assembly considers just one topic at a time.

Any registered voter may rise, pose a question, and speak either for or against an article on the warrant. Votes are frequently taken by voice or by raising a colored card, and when the outcome appears close, the moderator may call for a careful count. Because neighbors who disagree during the debate must continue to live along the same roads afterward, most speakers make an effort to remain respectful.

Nevertheless, town meetings have a notable weakness. Only those who are able to attend on that particular night have any say, so a town of several thousand residents may see merely a few hundred voters. Some towns attempt to encourage attendance by providing childcare or by scheduling the meeting on a weekend. Supporters maintain that the effort is justified, since citizens hear one another's reasoning face to face before reaching a decision.

Questions

1. What is the booklet that enumerates the questions voters will resolve called?

_____

_____

2. What responsibilities does the moderator have at a town meeting?

_____

_____

3. Who is entitled to speak and vote on an article?

_____

_____

4. What notable weakness do town meetings have?

_____

_____

5. Why might a town provide childcare during the meeting?

_____

_____

6. Why is a town meeting considered direct democracy?

_____

_____

Words to know

democracy: a way of governing in which the people make the decisions
warrant: the printed list of questions a town meeting will vote on
moderator: the person who leads a meeting and keeps it fair and orderly
article: one separate item or question on a list to be voted on
registered: officially signed up on the list of people allowed to vote

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Town Meeting Night in a Small Town

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Town Meeting Night in a Small Town

Easier · 177 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 2.5

1. A warrant.
2. Runs the meeting, gives each speaker a turn, and keeps one topic at a time.
3. Any registered voter.
4. Only the people who come that night get a say.
5. So parents with young children can come and take part.
6. The voters decide for themselves instead of choosing someone else to decide.

Triangle: Town Meeting Night in a Small Town

This passage · 273 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 8.8

1. A warrant.
2. Runs the meeting, gives each speaker a turn, and keeps the group on one topic at a time.
3. Any registered voter.
4. Only the people who can attend that night have a say.
5. So parents of young children can attend and take part in the decisions.
6. The voters decide the questions themselves instead of choosing someone else to decide.

Square: Town Meeting Night in a Small Town

Harder · 290 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 12.8

1. A warrant.
2. Presiding over the meeting, giving each speaker a turn, and keeping the group to one topic at a time.
3. Any registered voter.
4. Only the people who can attend that night have a say.
5. To make it possible for parents of young children to attend and participate.
6. The voters settle the questions themselves rather than choosing representatives to decide for them.