

**Around and About New Jersey**

**TEACHERS GUIDE**

**PROGRAM SIX**

**THE STATE HOUSE TOUR**

by

David Steven Cohen

NJN Public Television and the  
New Jersey Historical Commission,  
Department of State  
Trenton, N.J.

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## I. SYNOPSIS

Standing in front of a voting machine, Midge Guerrera, the series host, explains that there are three levels of government: a national government in Washington, a state government in Trenton, and local governments in our counties and towns. All begin with voting. She says that this program is about a visit to the State House in Trenton, which is the home of state government.

In the rotunda of the State House, Midge explains that the word democracy comes from the Greek word demos, meaning "people." Democracy means government by the people. But that doesn't mean all the people. At one time in New Jersey history if you didn't own property, or if you were a woman, or if you were an African American, or if you weren't twenty-one years of age, you couldn't vote. Furthermore, not everyone votes on every issue. We elect people to vote for us in Trenton, which is what we mean by representative government.

Karen Polling, our guide, takes the students into the General Assembly gallery, and explains that the state is divided into legislative districts, in which the voters elect one state senator and two members of the General Assembly from each district. Together these representatives constitute the two houses of the legislature. She takes the students to the Senate floor, where she explains that to become a law a bill must pass both houses of the legislature. The students debate and vote on a bill to ban homework.

After a bill passes both houses of the legislature, it must be either signed or vetoed by the governor. In the governor's outer office, Midge Guerrera explains that today the governor is elected directly by the voters, but the first governors of the state of New Jersey were elected by the legislature. A student, acting as governor, signs the "Homework Bill" into law.

## II. KEY WORDS

**Democracy** - government by the people

**Representative government** - electing representatives to vote on your behalf on specific issues

**Legislator** - a lawmaker, from the Latin word *legis*, meaning "law"

**Legislative district** - a geographical division represented by one senator and two members of the General Assembly

**Executive** - the person responsible for carrying out the laws

**Veto** - to prevent a bill that has passed both houses of the legislature from becoming a law

## III. NEW JERSEY CORE CURRICULUM CONTENT STANDARDS

STANDARD 6.2 (CIVICS) ALL STUDENTS WILL KNOW, UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE THE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY AND THE RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND ROLES OF A CITIZEN IN THE NATION AND THE WORLD.

**By the end of Grade 2, students will:**

**A. Civic Life, Politics, and Government**

1. Explain the need for rules, laws, and government.
2. Give examples of authority and recognize problems that might arise from lack of effective authority.
3. Describe how American citizens can participate in community and political life.

**C. The Constitution and American Democracy**

1. Identify community and government leaders (e.g., mayor, town council, President of the United States).

**Building upon knowledge and skills gained in preceding grades, by the end of Grade 4, students will:**

**A. Civic Life, Politics, and Government**

3. Recognize that government exists at the community, county, state, and federal levels.
4. Recognize national, state, and local legislators and government officials and explain how to contact them for help or to express an opinion.

**B. American Values and Principles**

1. Identify the fundamental values and principles of American democracy expressed in ... the first New Jersey Constitution.

**C. The Constitution and American Democracy**

2. Discuss how governmental bodies make decisions and explain the impact of those decisions on school and community life.
3. Identify major services provided by state and local government.
4. Delineate the respective roles of the three branches of the federal and state governments.

STANDARD 6.4 (UNITED STATES AND NEW JERSEY HISTORY) ALL STUDENTS WILL DEMONSTRATE KNOWLEDGE OF UNITED STATES AND NEW JERSEY HISTORY IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND LIFE AND EVENTS IN THE PAST AND HOW THEY RELATE TO THE PRESENT AND FUTURE.

**Building upon knowledge and skills gained in preceding grades, by the end of Grade 4, students will:**

**B. State and Nation**

2. Discuss the reasons why revolutionary leaders, including ... Governor William Livingston, fought for independence from England.

STANDARD 6.6 (GEOGRAPHY) ALL STUDENTS WILL APPLY KNOWLEDGE OF SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND OTHER GEOGRAPHIC SKILLS TO UNDERSTAND HUMAN BEHAVIOR IN RELATION TO THE PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT.

**Building upon knowledge and skills gained in preceding grades, by the end of Grade 4, students will:**

**A. The World in Spatial Terms**

1. Use physical and political maps to identify locations and spatial relationships of places within local and nearby communities.

## IV. THEMES

- A. **Democracy** - Voting qualifications have changed over the years.
- B. **Representative Government** - Representative government means electing people to vote on our behalf.
- C. **Legislating** - To become a law a bill must pass both houses of the legislature and be signed by the governor.

## V. CORE ACTIVITIES

### A. DEMOCRACY

#### 1. Objective

Students will interpret a primary historical document.

#### 2. After viewing the program

Reproduce and distribute the excerpts pertaining to voting qualifications from the 1776, 1844, and 1947 constitutions of the State of New Jersey in the "Supplementary Materials" section of this guide. Explain that just as the national government in Washington has a constitution that created and regulates the federal government, the state of New Jersey also has a constitution. In fact, New Jersey has had three constitutions -- in 1776, 1844, and 1947 -- each of which specified different qualifications for voting.

Either ask the students to read the passages from the state constitutions to themselves or read them aloud as the students follow the text. Then discuss which groups of people were excluded from voting in each of these state constitutions? Which of these constitutions was the most democratic? Why? Which was the least democratic? Why?

## B. REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

### 1. Objective

Students will interpret a map to determine specific information about legislative districts.

### 2. After viewing the program

Reproduce and distribute the map of legislative districts in the "Supplementary Materials" section of this guide. Ask the students to determine how many legislative districts there are in New Jersey. Then ask the students individually to determine in which legislative district they reside. Finally, the teacher should ask the students why the districts are of different sizes and whether that is fair? Additionally, the teacher might ask why the districts are of different shapes and whether that is fair?

## C. LEGISLATING

### 1. Objective

Students will simulate how laws are made in a representative government.

### 2. After viewing the program

Divide the class into three groups, representing three legislative districts. Ask each group to discuss an issue, such as the "Homework Bill" mentioned in the program or any other issue of interest, real or made-up.

After the discussion ask each group to elect one person per group to be a state senator and two students per group to be members of the General Assembly. Then reassemble the class and have the entire class nominate and elect a governor.

Ask the six students who have been elected senators to meet in front of the class to propose a bill based on the discussions of their legislative district. Emphasize that the elected representatives do not have to reflect the opinions of their districts. Ask them to debate and then vote on the bill.

Then ask the three students who have been elected members of the General Assembly to meet, debate, and then vote on the bill. Finally, if the bill passes both houses of the legislature, ask the student who was elected governor to either sign or veto the bill.

## VI. ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

### A. LETTERS TO YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVES

#### 1. Objective

Students will participate in the democratic process.

#### 2. After viewing the program

After obtaining the names and addresses of their state senators or members of the General Assembly in CORE ACTIVITY B above (REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT) each student should write a letter to his/her representative on an issue of concern to him/her.

## VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

### A. FOR STUDENTS

Fradin, Dennis B. *Voting and Elections* ("A True Book") Chicago: Childrens Press, 1985.

A simple history of voting from the time of the Greeks and Romans, with an

emphasis on the United States. Describes changes in voting qualifications in clear and simple terms. Contains historically accurate color and black and white illustrations.

Fay, Elaine and Charles A. Stansfield, Jr. *New Jersey: Yesterday and Today*. Morristown, N.J. and Needham, Mass.: Silver Burdett and Ginn, 1987).

Chapter 9 (pp. 152-167) deals with Trenton as the state capitol, the state constitutions of 1776 and 1844, and the first governors of New Jersey; part of Chapter 11 (pp. 194-197) describes the Progressive period reforms in government and women's suffrage; and Chapter 13 (pp. 218-229) explains the three branches of government, legislative districts, and how a bill becomes a law.

## B. FOR TEACHERS

Prabhuy, Barbara Williams, comp. and ed. *Spotlight on New Jersey Government*. 6th ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

A good explanation of state government in New Jersey. Contains chapters on the New Jersey constitution, the legislative, the executive branch, the judicial branch, finances and taxation, land use planning, and political parties and elections.

Gerald M. Pomper, ed. *The Political State of New Jersey*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986.

Essays by political scientists on New Jersey's political environment, institutions, and public policy. Includes chapters on the governor, the



legislature, the courts, and the bureaucracy. Emphasizes the settings and workings of state government.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS**

## VOTING QUALIFICATIONS

### 1776 Constitution

"All inhabitants of this colony of full age, who are worth fifty pounds . . . , and have resided within the county in which they claim a vote for twelve months immediately preceding the election, shall be entitled to vote."

### 1844 Constitution

"Every white male citizen of the United States, of the age of twenty-one years, who shall have been a resident of this state one year, and of the county in which he claims to vote five months. . . shall be entitled to vote."

### 1947 Constitution

"Every citizen of the United States, of the age of twenty-one,\* who shall have been a resident of the state one year, and of the county in which he claims his vote five months. . . shall be entitled to vote."

Source: Julian Boyd, *Fundamental Laws  
and Constitutions of New Jersey*

\* Amended to eighteen years of age in 1974.

# LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS

