



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2008 Volume III: Democracy in Theory and Practice

Who decides who benefits? A comparative view of wealth distribution using examples from New Mexico's Legislature, Santa Fe City and the Pueblo of Pojoaque

Guide for Curriculum Unit 08.03.12, published September 2008
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"Who decides who benefits in New Mexico?" This curriculum unit will enable 75 Capital High School seniors on the south side of Santa Fe to explore democracy and distributive wealth, as well as take a provocative look at current values of our society, fellow classmates and elected representatives.

My students live in **Santa Fe**—a \$ 10.50 an hour minimum wage mecca for New Mexicans—the capital of Native American culture and art—profit center to many Mexican laborers, and the offbeat hub of alternative ways of thinking and living. 'Our city different' attracts both Tibetan monks and citizen legislators who think creatively and proactively. And therefore, hopefully, my students will learn to think in novel ways.

This curriculum unit features student investigations on the citizen legislature, the governor and the checks and balances they exercise. It juxtaposes the New Mexican law making process against economic choices of state, tribal and local government. The values of a good society are the touchstone for evaluating the costs and benefits of raising taxes, efficient use of government funds and the economic outcomes which they produce. Because all priorities in the generation of wealth are not equal, students will be able to see the tradeoffs between capital reinvestment, small business development, jobs and services. And because all legislative actions reflect compromise, they will be able to see the political 'horse trading' involved in decision making.

Using three economic initiatives near Santa Fe: The New Mexico Film Industry, the Buffalo Thunder spa and resort and Santa Fe's school educational plan, students will reflect on and assess their role and responsibility in a democracy. They will compare the New Mexico, Pueblo of Pojoaque and Santa Fe government's resource allocation and decision making process. Students will develop a lens of analysis about their own values and those of their elected representatives. They will learn to ask critical questions, will see how they can participate in a democracy and make choices about their future.

This curriculum unit culminates in a *class visit* to the Pueblo of Pojoaque about 10 miles north of Santa Fe, and New Mexico's film office and Legislature, known as "the *Roundhouse*." Mayor David Coss of Santa Fe will visit our school and discuss Santa Fe's economic development plan. Students will apply their knowledge by listening, observing, asking questions of presenters, and remaining engaged in political decision making in their lives.

By the end of the first Semester, students will be more knowledgeable about the choices they make. They will

have a firm foundation to interact with their classmates on issues of local concern, will be challenged to participate and will have knowledge of the state and local democratic process at work.

(Developed for U.S. Government, History, and Economics, grades 11-12; recommended for U.S. Government, History, and Economics, grades 11-12)

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