

LESSON 13 – CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISE

“HOW SHOULD REPRESENTATIVE SMITH VOTE?”

Background

Suppose that Representative Smith is visiting your community to seek advice and opinions. She has arranged a public hearing on Thursday night at seven o'clock. She has invited the people who live in her district to attend the hearing. She is hoping for a good turnout. Representative Smith wants to find out if she should vote for a bill that would prevent smoking in public places.

Instructions

Read each story segment and answer the questions that follow it. Prepare to play the role of one of the groups described after the story. Each group should prepare a presentation to make at the public hearing. Representative Smith and her staff will ask your opinion about a bill in Congress.

Reading 1 – *Representative Smith makes a decision*

Smoking cigarettes is a national problem. Studies have shown that smoking is dangerous to everyone's health. Even breathing smoke from someone else's cigarette is dangerous. Each year, thousands of Americans die from smoking cigarettes.

Many farmers in Representative Smith's congressional district are involved in growing tobacco. Many other people make their living by working in factories that make tobacco products.

There is a bill in Congress that would forbid smoking in public places. Representative Smith knows smoking is dangerous and costly. She also knows that if she votes for the bill, the tobacco industry will suffer. Many people will lose their jobs, and some businesses will fail.

Representative Smith must decide how to vote on the bill. Should she vote against the bill to protect the jobs of the people in her district? Should she vote for the bill because she believes smoking is dangerous to people's health? The public hearing will help Representative Smith decide how to vote.

Representatives are supposed to support laws that protect people's rights. They are also supposed to support laws that serve the common good.

Reading 1 – Questions to discuss

1. Which rights do you think are most important? Why?

2. What is the common good in this situation? Explain your answer.

Group 1: Representative Smith and Her Staff

Representative Smith must decide if she will vote “yes” or “no” on the bill. Before she decides, she and her staff want to know what the people in her district think about the problem. Representative Smith wants to speak with the groups that have valuable information about the situation. After she hears from the people she represents, she will make a decision.

Group 2: Tobacco Growers and Processors

You earn a living by growing and processing tobacco, just as your families have done for generations. If Representative Smith supports the bill, many people will lose their jobs. Some people will lose the businesses and their way of life.

Group 3: Citizens for Freedom

You believe that adults should be allowed to make their own lifestyle choices. You think that this bill would limit people’s freedom to make their own decisions about their health and smoking.

Group 4: Citizens for a Smoke-Free Environment

You think that smoking in public places is a serious problem. Smoking in public violates the rights of nonsmokers who are forced to breathe secondhand smoke.

Group 5: Citizens for Better Health

You think that putting limits on smoking in public would help improve everyone’s health. All citizens carry the costs of healthcare.

Instructions for Public Hearings

A member of each group may tell Representative Smith the group’s opinion about the proposed law. That member may also give her advice on how to vote on the issue. Then, Representative Smith and her staff will discuss the problem, decide what to do, and explain their decision.

Discussion Questions for Each Group

1. Do you agree with Representative Smith’s decision? Why or why not?
2. Why might citizens disagree about which responsibility is more important for their representative to carry out?
3. In what other ways could Representative Smith carry out her responsibilities in this situation?
4. Did you change your own opinion after listening to all the groups? If you did, what argument convinced you?