

**Cyber-Parliament:  
Teaching Parliamentary Procedure Concepts Using the Game *Mafia* in Virtual Classrooms**

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## **Cyber-Parliament: Teaching Parliamentary Procedure Concepts Using the Game *Mafia* in Virtual Classrooms**

### **Introduction**

New teaching strategies are constantly being developed, and with technologies rapidly evolving, the demand for virtual teaching activities relevant to agricultural education is imperative. Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, instruction across the United States transitioned to an online or hybrid format, which resulted in one of the greatest challenges faced by the education system (Daniel, 2020). While limited research has been conducted on the effect of the pandemic on school-based agricultural education (SBAE), it has created issues for many educators nationwide (McKim & Sorensen, 2020). Strategies to encourage meaningful engagement through quality instruction (Edgar et al., 2016), now in remote settings, is vital as agricultural educators learn to thrive versus just survive teaching online.

Intra-curricular activities, such as FFA, have also been forced to adapt to these online changes, such as replacing national Career Development Events (CDEs) and Leadership Development Events (LDEs) with a new student-led initiative called Leadership Challenge Events in 2020 (National FFA Organization, 2020a). One issue agricultural educators may face is the challenge of teaching and coaching interactive CDEs and LDEs, such as parliamentary procedure, in online settings. The parliamentary procedure LDE is designed to develop student leadership, research, problem-solving, and critical-thinking skills while reinforcing meeting etiquette (National FFA Organization, 2020b). Parliamentary procedure has impacted student leadership development through SBAE and advances students' skills to hold professional and orderly meetings in community, workforce, and government positions (Connors, 2004). Following the shift to online learning, parliamentary procedure has become a difficult subject to teach as it is challenging to facilitate student engagement online.

### **How it Works**

We used the game *Mafia* as the basis of this activity. *Mafia* is a game of deduction and reasoning originally created by Dimitry Davidoff in 1986 in Russia (Davidoff, 1999). While the original game contains a pre-existing voting element to remove players from the game, to make the activity more relevant to parliamentary law, the rules must be adjusted to include Robert's Rules of Order (Roberts, 2020). The first changes are the player names (i.e., Narrator to President, Mafia to Parliamentarian, Doctor to Secretary, and Sheriff to Sentinel, Townspeople to Voting Members). In these respective roles, the President primarily serves as the narrator and mediator, the Parliamentarian removes at least one player, the Secretary saves a player, and the Sentinel investigates a player. The activity should ideally occur in a mock meeting setting that uses parliamentary procedure, and motions must be made correctly for the activity to continue. Educators also have the ability to select specific motions to be used in each meeting.

To introduce the activity to students, we used a PowerPoint presentation to explain the rules and various parliamentary procedures. Using an online platform, such as Zoom, Teams, or Skype, the President should send a private chat to randomly selected players regarding their roles in the game prior to the start. Following this, the President will create a backstory to reveal the player who will be removed and muted for the remainder of the activity. For example, the President will state, "Bobby was causing disruption in the meeting room and has been secretly removed from the meeting by the Parliamentarian." Players will then make a main motion followed by a second to determine who to remove from the meeting next and discuss their

reasoning. During the discussion, students have the option to make additional motions (i.e., postpone indefinitely, amend, previous question, rise to a point of order, etc.) to attempt to identify the parliamentarian. Once the discussion concludes, the President will call a vote to remove a player. Following the passing or failing of the motion, the removed individual will be muted for the remainder of the activity and the next round will commence. The activity will continue in this format until either the Parliamentarian is discovered, or all players are removed.

### **Results to Date**

After completing one round of the activity with an advanced agricultural education course focusing in CDE and LDE preparation at New Mexico State University, students interacted with their peers and engaged in discussions that reinforced their understanding of the basics of parliamentary procedure. In the first round, the instructor served as the President, which helped model expectations for the game as students learned the rules and practiced making motions and discussing their viewpoints. Some students who were new to *Mafia* were slightly confused by the rules until activity started, so formative feedback and reminders of the rules were helpful to keep students on track. Students recommended that the online social deduction game, *Among Us*, could be used to connect existing knowledge to the content (Lorenz, 2021). Students also suggested that a one-page summary or diagram of the activity would be beneficial to view at the onset of the activity to reinforce concepts, as opposed to just providing a copy of the PowerPoint presentation highlighting the rules.

Using this activity to practice and teach parliamentary procedure can assist in developing student knowledge, teaching or reinforcing various aspects of the LDE, and training concepts for conducting formal meetings and events where parliamentary procedure is used. This activity can potentially increase student engagement and create a friendly competitive environment among peers. Finally, it allows students to practice peer interaction and conduct business online.

### **Advice to Others**

This activity would be best used in an introduction to parliamentary procedure lesson, with the option of being an assessment tool later in a unit. We also recommend creating a one-page guide or diagram to reinforce the rules and common motions students may use to discover the parliamentarian. Allowing all students to serve as President as they become more familiar with the game will also provide students an opportunity to preside and participate in meetings. As students become more familiar with parliamentary motions, we also recommend making rules for a more advanced game where students are limited to use specific motions, similar to a prompt they may see at a state or national parliamentary procedure contest. Finally, additional resources, such as the online game, *Among Us*, can help reinforce students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. While *Among Us* does not provide video-based virtual interaction like Zoom or Google Meets, students can engage through the use of online avatars.

### **Resources Needed**

This activity requires access to an online video conferencing platform, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meets, with minimal cost, as the price will be dependent on the school's pre-existing subscription(s) to these platforms. Based on student feedback, a handout explaining the procedures of the activity should also be sent to the students. Finally, resources to teach parliamentary procedure, including but not limited to a copy of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, will also be helpful to reinforce student learning of parliamentary procedure.

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