

The German Bundestag

Transatlantic Outreach Program 2008

Unit Plan by Katherine Field



Title: German Bundestag
Level: Grades 10 - 12
Course: International Relations or European History

Introduction:

This lesson is designed to give students a basic idea how the German Bundestag works, as well as an overview of contemporary issues in Germany. The unit should take at least ten eighty-minute class periods and involve substantial preparation outside the classroom.

Materials Needed:

- Notebook computer with LCD projector
- Access to a computer lab
- Placards with political party names and symbols
- Gavel and podium

Unit Goals:

1. Students will study how people create and change structures of power, authority and governance (National Council for the Social Studies, Thematic Strand VI {<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards>})
2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of how the major elements of international relations and world affairs affect their community, state, and nation (CT Social Studies Standard 8 {<http://www.ctsocialstudies.org/standards.htm>}).

Skills Objectives:

1. Students will improve their public speaking skills.
2. Students will refine their negotiation tactics by working together to achieve compromise on a controversial topic.

3. Students will develop better research skills and be able to support their arguments with evidence.

Content Objectives:

1. Students will gain a basic understanding of the German Bundestag.
2. Students will be able to develop realistic proposals regarding solutions to a major problem in Germany today.
3. Students will be able to analyze the various domestic, political, economic, and social factors that play roles in the development of domestic and/or foreign policy in Germany.

Attitude Objectives:

1. Students will recognize the importance of learning about contemporary world issues.
2. Students will gain confidence in their ability to speak effectively in front of an audience.

Background Notes:

Before beginning the activities of this unit, students should learn that the Federal Republic of Germany is composed of sixteen states, and that the Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic, federal, and constitutional state. It has a bicameral legislature, composed of the Bundesrat (upper house) and the Bundestag (lower house). The German Bundestag is elected every four years. Since the elections of 2005, there are 612 members. The Bundesrat, or upper house, is comprised of 69 members who are not directly elected, but delegates of their state governments.

It is also helpful for the teacher to give an overview of the Bundestag so students have some basic context for their activities. I recommend using some of the activities and overheads in the Transatlantic Outreach Program's Germany Today

unit and its Welcome to Germany unit that are available to all teachers for free (see resources listed below).

Explain to your students that the Bundestag is the elected representation of the German people. Germans over the age of 18 can cast two votes: one for a candidate and one for a state list of candidates put up by a particular political party. Half of the seats are allocated by the parties' state lists (the second vote) and the other half by the direct election of candidates (the first vote). In short, the number of seats a political party has in the Bundestag is a result of the number of votes it received.

The Bundestag is somewhat similar to the U.S. House of Representatives. It has three main responsibilities: legislation, election of the federal chancellor, and control of the government.

Unlike in the U.S. House of Representatives, however, the fate of most bills debated in the Bundestag is already decided when it reaches the floor. German parliamentarians tend to vote following party lines; a parliamentary party group decides prior to the debate how they will vote and then all members follow the party group discipline.

Current Parties in the Bundestag:

- Social Democratic Party (SPD)
- Christian Democratic Union (CDU)
- Christian Social Union (CSU)
- Alliance 90/The Greens
- The Left Party PDS (Die Linke)

Useful Resources for Teachers and Students:

- Robert Jervis, Joann Prewitt, Preston Shockley. Germany Today. Transatlantic Outreach Program, 2007, pp 92-116.

- Glen Blankenship, Louisa Moffitt, and a Team of U.S. Social Studies Educators. Welcome to Germany. Transatlantic Outreach Program, 2005, pp 103-115.
- http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/parliament/
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21MlrowJqqc>
- <http://countrystudies.us/germany/154.htm>
- <http://www.aicgs.org/analysis/c/stuchtey050208.aspx>

Unit Activities:

1. Divide Students into five group and assign each a political party represented in the German Bundestag. The groups should not consist of equal numbers of students, but should reflect the proportional power of each party in the Bundestag. For example, the SPD Party should have a larger number of students assigned to it than the Green Party because the Green Party has fewer seats in the Bundestag. After dividing students into groups, they should work together to create a PowerPoint presentation about their assigned party. Each person in the group should be responsible for completing at least two slides and all members of the group must be required to speak during the presentation (three days).

2. Assign each political party group a problem in contemporary Germany to research. Using Microsoft Publisher (if available) the same groups should work together to create a brochure outlining the basic problem, short-term and long-term effects, and possible solutions. The brochures will be circulated among the different groups and all of the problems discussed. After the class has discussed all of the problems, it should vote on which problem they consider the most pressing (three days). Possible problems include:
 - Educational Reform
 - Social Security Reform
 - Foreign Policy Crisis such as Russia's invasion of Georgia

- Unemployment
 - Immigration and Integration
3. Tell the class they will be representing their political party in a parliamentary committee in the Bundestag. The committee to which the students will be assigned depends on the topic they choose. For example, if they decide to focus on the Georgia situation they should be assigned to the Committee on Foreign Affairs. You should give the students a quick overview of how the committees work. Each student should be given one of the committee delegates to represent, making sure they are from the same party that they student has been representing thus far. Information on each of the committees and its members can be found at: www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/committees (one day).
 4. In class, students should discuss the topic with the other members of their party. They should exchange phone numbers and email addresses so they can continue to formulate a party position on the topic at home. They should be encouraged to work with their party via a Google Group set up by the teacher for this purpose. Students should come to class the next day with a 45 second speech outlining their position on the topic as well as their proposed solution(s) to it. To give students an idea what a committee session might look like in the Bundestag, show a short clip from of a session available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21MlrowJqqc>.(one day).
 5. Each student should be given a placard with their party name on it as well as the name of the person they are representing. The class should simulate a session of the committee. The teacher should act as the committee chair, recognizing speakers, keeping track of speaking time, etc. Students should raise their placards to be recognized by the chair. The parliamentary rules are available from: www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/parliament/function/legal/rules.pdf.

After each student has given their introductory speech, students should debate in a moderated caucus the solutions that were proposed. A student may motion for an un-moderated caucus for a set period of time, during which students may form alliances with other parties and begin to draft a bill addressing the topic. Students should continue to work on their bill outside of class via their Google Group (one-two days).

6. Students should come to class with bills already drafted and copied for the members of the committee. Students must motion to introduce their bill. The introduction of each bill should be followed by a brief moderated caucus to discuss its merits. After each bill has been discussed, the class should vote on the bills following Rule #48 in the Rules of Procedure: www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/parliament/function/legal/rules.pdf (one day).
7. Debrief with the class. What were the merits of the bill that passed? What would happen to the bill after it passed their committee? In what ways is the process similar to and different from the legislative process in the United States? Does the bill have a chance at effectively dealing with the problem? (one day).

Assessments:

1. PowerPoint Presentation Rubric:
 - Student worked effectively with group and shared work equitably = ____/10 points
 - Student completed at least two slides = ____/10 points
 - Slides were accurate, thoughtfully designed, and contained pictures and text = ____/10 pts
 - Student spoke clearly and effectively during the presentation and did not merely repeat the information on the slide= ____/10 pts

- Presentation gave a thorough, concise overview of their assigned political party = ____/20 pts
- Presentation included a Works Cited slide with at least four reliable sources= ____/10 points
- Total Score = ____/70 points

2. Brochure Rubric

- Students shared work equitably within their group = ____/10 points
- Brochure is informative and accurate = ____/20 points
- Brochure contains information on the background of the problem, the current situation, the possible short and long-term consequences, and proposed solutions = ____/20 points
- Brochure is creative and contains pictures as well as text = ____/10 pts
- Brochure includes a Works Cited with at least six reliable sources= ____/10 pts
- Total Score = ____/70 points

3. Simulation Rubric

- Student works effectively with their political party in the classroom and within their Google Group = ____/25 points
- Student speaks clearly and effectively in front of an audience = ____/15 points
- Student is thoroughly informed and uses reliable evidence to support all remarks = ____/30 points
- Student helps draft a substantive bill in keeping with the position of their political party = ____/20 points
- Student participates actively in the class debriefing session = ____/10 points
- Total Score = ____/100 points