

## Activity #4: *Shaping Opinion*

### Objective 28: Civics and Government Perspectives

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In this activity, students practice evaluating public opinion polls and discuss how polls can be useful for determining how people feel about an issue.

**Description:** After examining two fictional opinion polls, students evaluate the conclusions and then create their own opinion polls.

#### ► **Directions**

1. Make copies of the handouts shown on the following pages.
2. Introduce the activity by reminding your class that polls are used by a variety of public and private groups to measure public opinion. Write the following definitions on the board:

**Public opinion poll:** In a public opinion poll relatively few people—the sample group—are interviewed in order to estimate the opinions of a whole population, such as students at a school, citizens of a country, or people of a certain age group.

**Sample group:** The sample group is the group of individuals interviewed to represent the opinions of a larger population. The sample group is often chosen at random.

**Population:** The population refers to the people whose opinions are being estimated through interviews with the sample group.

3. Ask the class the following question: Why are sample groups often chosen at random?
4. Divide the class into small groups and distribute copies of the two handouts to each group.
5. Allow time for the student groups to complete the Public Opinion Poll Evaluation.
6. Review the work together, pointing out bias in the two public opinion polls.

**Variation:** Have each group create opinion poll questions, and interview students from other classes. Have each group select an issue that relates to school activities such as the

## Social Studies

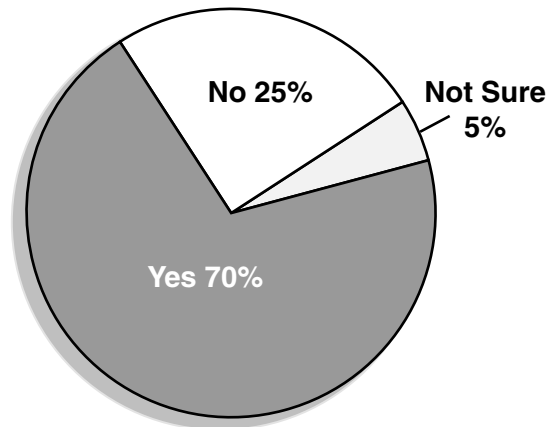
student council or school sports programs. Have each group present its findings to the class or make a poster.

**Variation:** Have the entire class choose one issue and develop a poll to measure the opinion of the student body. The sample group should be much larger for this poll.

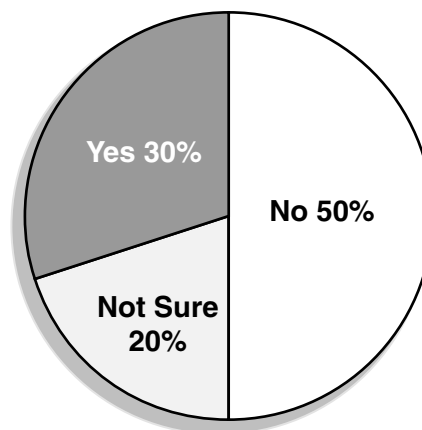
## Waterville's Newspapers Take a Public Opinion Poll

The town of Waterville (population 25,000) is in the middle of an election year. One of the pressing issues on the ballot has to do with the library and public parks. The town has only three small parks and one library. In order to build more parks and expand the library, more tax revenue will be needed. If passed, the municipal tax increase would total about \$20 a year for each citizen. The Waterville Gazette and The Waterville Sentinel have both conducted public opinion polls to find out how the residents feel about the issue. The findings of the two newspaper polls are shown below:

The Waterville Gazette asked a sample group of 2,500 citizens the following question: Should the library be expanded and should more public parks be built in Waterville?



The Waterville Sentinel asked a sample group of 800 citizens the following question: Should the citizens of Waterville be expected to pay higher taxes to build more public parks and expand the library?



## Public Opinion Poll Evaluation

1. Which of the two polls was more effective in estimating the opinions of the town of Waterville? Use evidence to support your answer.

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2. How could you improve the poll taken by *The Waterville Gazette*?

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3. How could you improve the poll taken by *The Waterville Sentinel*?

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