

MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON – 1939

Mr. Smith is appointed as a US Senator by a corrupt political party machine led by the Governor, a media publisher (Jim Taylor,) and Senator Paine. Paine, a very popular and respected Senator, is hoping to keep Senator Smith from stopping a bill that will build an unnecessary but profitable dam in Willow Creek. Senator Paine suggests Smith sponsor his own bill to build a boys camp in Willow Creek. Meanwhile, Smith's secretary, Saunders, tells him that the dam and the camp share the same land site. Smith threatens to expose Paine and Taylor to the world, but Paine frames Smith and tells the Senate that Smith actually owns the land. Smith fights back with a one-man filibuster.

Part 1: Vocabulary

Directions: Using the content of the film, identify and determine a definition for the following terms:

Stooge – a person acting as a decoy, an accomplice

Political Machine – a group of people that controls a political party

Honorary Appointment – an appointment made without the usual process or requirements

Graft – to acquire money or influence through abuse of one's position in politics

Quorum – the number of members of a group needed to complete business (usually a majority)

Compromise – cooperation, finding the middle ground, give and take

Part 2: Identify Main Characters

Directions: Briefly describe the characters and places in the list below.

1. Senator Paine: Senior Senator from the same state as Smith. He is well respected and very popular. He is controlled, however, by Jim Taylor, who uses the Senator to win new government contracts and money.
2. (James) Jim Taylor: He is a powerful media publisher in Smith's state. He owns both print and audio media outlets. Uses his relationship with Paine to get government money for projects with little or no benefit to the public.
3. Governor Hopper: The Governor for Smith's state. When the other Senator from the state dies suddenly, he names Smith as Senator. He, too, is controlled by Taylor.
4. Jefferson Smith: A "Boy Ranger". He runs a successful camp for boys and is named Senator because of his inexperience (naivete) with government. Paine takes advantage of him to pass bills that are favorable to Taylor. Smith finds out and threatens to expose the corruption.
5. Willow Creek: The name of a piece of land in Smith's state. Smith wants to use the land for a new boys camp. Paine, however, wants the land to build an expensive dam that will be built by Taylor's interests.
6. Chick McGann: He is a "thug" or "brute" of Jim Taylor. He watches Smith and Paine to make sure that they are doing what Taylor wants.
7. Susan Paine: Daughter of Senator Paine. She feigns interest in Smith to distract him from his government work.

8. Saunders: **Smith's secretary. She was secretary for Paine and is now supposed to "control" Smith and not let him do much. She knows all about Taylor's political machine and influence over Paine. She is very cynical and jaded about government and she exposes the corruption to Smith.**
9. Diz Moore: **A news reporter. He is a friend of Saunders.**
10. President of the Senate: **His job is to maintain the "rules of order" for the Senate.**

Part II – Understanding Plot

Directions: Answer the questions below thoroughly.

11. Who dies at the beginning of the film?
A Senator from Governor Hopper's state.
12. What decision does Governor Hopper have to make?
He needs to decide between appointing a person who works for Taylor (but the people oppose) or a person who is "independent" (but Taylor opposes).
13. Why is Mr. Smith appointed as Senator?
He is unknown among adults, naïve and easily manipulated.
14. What does Mr. Smith do when he first gets to Washington D.C. and how does Saunders act towards Mr. Smith? Why?
Smith acts as a tourist and is awed by the capital. Saunders treats him like a child she has to babysit. She has little respect for him.
15. What idea/bill does Smith propose and introduce?
Smith proposes a bill to use the Willow Creek area as a new boys camp.
16. How does Senator Paine react when Smith tries to challenge the "deficiency bill"?
He threatens to destroy his reputation by "framing" him as if he was the corrupt politician.

Part III: Understanding Motives

17. List three ways that Paine and Taylor try to stop Smith's filibuster:
- Telling him "the truth" and trying to convince him about making "compromises".**
 - Trying to use the "rules of order" to interrupt and stop his talking.**
 - Using the media to pressure him to stop.**
18. List two ways that Saunders tries to help Senator Smith:
- Teach him about how to use the "rules of order" to his advantage.**
 - Use the "boys" to get Smith's message out to the public.**
19. What does Senator Paine show Senator Smith (that arrived from their home state)?
Telegrams that urge him to stop his filibuster.
20. Is this democracy? If so, is it fair? If it's not democracy, what is it?
Answers will vary.