Judy Layzer
11.007 Day 8 Notes: **Defining Problems—Symbols, Numbers, & Causal Stories**

DEFINING PROBLEMS

What do we mean by the phrase "problem definition"?

Why do people engage in strategic representation?

Why is problem definition, or strategic representation so important in politics?

Symbols and Numbers

What sorts of things are likely to bring a problem to the attention of government officials, according to Kingdon?

According to Stone, what sorts of political decisions do indicators conceal?

Symbols are central to effective problem definition. What are some aspects of symbolic representation?

Causal Stories

Causal reasoning in politics is not just about understanding how things work, although there are genuine struggles over this. Causal reasoning in the polis also involves assigning blame or responsibility, forging alliances, and distributing benefits and costs.

Devising causal stories, in turn, entails strategic crafting, using symbols and numbers.

What are the different types of causal stories that advocates employ?

Stone is not saying that problems don't have real causes or that advocates are just making things up to suit their political needs. But she is saying that every explanation must be framed in order to be potent in politics. So the real question is why do some stories get adopted as *the* story, while others do not?

What kinds of political impacts can causal stories have?

Think about the different causal stories you could tell about gun control, depending on which side you are on.