

Children's Books and Web Sites on the U.S. Government

Congress

Congress for Kids from the Dirksen Congressional Center

<http://congressforkids.net/index.htm>

Geared for grades 4-12, this interactive site provides a tour of the federal government, covering the three branches of government, democracy, the Constitution, and elections.

The Congress (Into the Third Century series). Richard B. Bernstein and Jerome Agel. New York: Walker and Company, 1989. Young adults.

Sketches the history of Congress from its roots in the colonial and Revolutionary periods to the present day. Focuses on the place of Congress in our constitutional system and describes the three major functions and responsibilities of Congress: to make laws (legislate), to discuss major national issues (debate), and to investigate national problems, the workings of government, and the need for new laws.

The Congress of the United States: A Student Companion, 2nd ed. Donald A. Ritchie. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Young adults.

An encyclopedia-style resource that explains terms related to Congress, with articles focusing on key concepts, personalities, and events. The topics covered include congressional leadership, Congress' relationship with the president, elections and succession, notable legislation, Capitol buildings, and traditions. Includes handy lists throughout the book, such as the majority leaders of the House and Senate, members of Congress who were expelled, and the longest-serving members of Congress.

House Mouse, Senate Mouse. Peter W. Barnes and Cheryl Shaw Barnes. Alexandria, VA: VSP Books, 1996. Grades K-4.

Explains how our laws are made—in this case, a law establishing a national cheese. Describes researching and drafting a bill, committee hearings and markup, floor action, and presidential action—along with the idea of compromise.

The House of Representatives (Know Your Government series). Bruce A. Ragsdale. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. Young adults.

Surveys the history of the House and discusses the modern House; profiles notable Speakers of the House, such as Henry Clay and Tip O'Neill; describes the importance of committees; and explains how a bill becomes a law. Includes a glossary and lots of photos.

How a Bill Becomes a Law. John Hamilton. Edina, MN: ABDO Publishing, 2005. Grades 3-5.

A very basic explanation of the legislative process, geared for grade school students. Includes a graphic showing how a bill becomes a law, a glossary, and interesting photos.

I'm Just a Bill! Kansas City, MO: Andrew McMeel Publishing, 1997. Grades K-12.

Contains the words to the Saturday morning "Schoolhouse Rocks" cartoon.

My Senator and Me. Senator Edward M. Kennedy and Splash. New York: Scholastic Press, 2006. Grades 3-6.

We follow Senator Kennedy and his dog Splash through a busy day in Washington, D.C., from press conferences to meeting with school groups to committee discussions to a floor vote.

The Senate (Know Your Government series). Donald A. Ritchie. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988. Young adults.

Surveys the history of the Senate and discusses the modern Senate; profiles the Senate's great orators, such as Daniel Webster, and other notable personalities, such as Lyndon Johnson; describes the Senate's relationship with the House; and explains how a bill becomes a law. Includes a glossary and lots of photographs.

The U.S. Congress. Patricia J. Murphy. Minneapolis: Compass Point Books, 2002. Grades 1-4.

A very basic explanation of the history, structure, and functions of Congress, geared for grade school students. Includes a glossary and lots of photos.

U.S. House of Representatives

Educational Resources: <http://www.house.gov/house/Educate.shtml>

Kids in the House Web Site: <http://clerkkids.house.gov/>

The first Web site provides a list of links mainly to historical documents, such as the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Other links are to documents that explain how a bill becomes a law. There is a "historical information" link to the Clerk of the House Web site, which provides information on the historical highlights of the U.S. House, including artwork and the House chamber.

The second Web site is geared for younger students and contains many interactive features describing important people, events, and works of art in the House; how a bill becomes a law; and frequently asked questions about the House.

U.S. Senate

http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Senate_Historical_Office.htm

Provides links to institutional, biographical, and statistical information compiled and maintained by the Senate Historical Office. There is an online version of the *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress*, which provides biographical and bibliographical information for all Senate and House members; information on the Senate's institutional development, powers and procedures, leadership, and officers and staff; statistical information covering many aspects of Senate history; and historical photographs.

What a Senator Does. Roy Hoopes. New York: John Day Company, 1970. Grades 5-9.

Explains how the Senate works by profiling a day-in-the-life of seven senators. This book is dated but still useful, and the more than 150 photographs are very interesting. Other day-in-the-life-of-a-senator books for children and young adults include: *I Want to Know about the United States Senate* by Senator Charles Percy (1976); *Senator: In the Company of Connie Mack, U.S. Senator from Florida* by Richard Sobol (1995); and *Senator: A Profile of Bill Bradley in the U.S. Senate* by William Jaspersohn (1992).

The Presidency

The Presidency (Into the Third Century series). Richard B. Bernstein and Jerome Agel. New York: Walker and Company, 1989. Young adults.

A history of the presidency, including how the presidents have influenced history and how history has shaped the presidency. Arranged chronologically by president.

The Presidency of the United States: A Student Companion, 2nd ed. Richard M. Pious. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Young adults.

An encyclopedia-style resource that explains terms related to the presidency, including the White House, presidential history, first ladies, powers, policymaking, agencies, advisors, and elections. Contains biographies on all the presidents and vice presidents and selected first ladies.

The President of the United States. Scott Ingram. San Diego: Blackbirch Press, 2002. Grades 3-6.

An easy-to-understand introduction to the office of the presidency. Describes the history of the office, how the presidency relates to the other branches of government, running for president, and the people who help the president do his job. Includes a list of presidential facts, a schedule of a typical day for a modern U.S. president, a glossary, and an index.

Presidents of the United States

<http://www.ipl.org/div/potus/>

Provides background information, election results, cabinet members, notable events, and some points of interest on each of the presidents. Includes links to biographies, historical documents, audio and video files, and other presidential sites.

Smithsonian Institution Web Sites on the U.S. President

<http://www.smithsonian.org/resource/faq/nmah/political.htm>

Links to a wide array of Smithsonian collections on the U.S. presidency, including presidential portraits in the National Portrait Gallery, the First Ladies Gowns, and photographs from presidential inaugurations.

So You Want to Be President? Judith St. George. New York: Philomel Books, 2000. Grades 1-6.

An entertaining and whimsical book that looks at the different backgrounds, physical characteristics, and personality traits of the presidents. Underscores the idea that anyone can be president: fat or skinny, homely or handsome, shy or outgoing, young or old. Outstanding illustrations. Also contains a list of all the presidents with very brief biographical information and a selected bibliography.

The White House: An Illustrated History. Catherine O'Neill Grace. New York: Scholastic Nonfiction, 2003. Grades 3 and up.

A beautiful book of more than 200 photos as well as narrative descriptions that provide historical perspectives and behind-the-scenes looks at the people who make the White House run. The book features an introduction by First Lady Laura Bush and was published in cooperation

with the White House Historical Association.

White House Kids

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/kids>

Geared for grade school students, this Web site provides presidential biographies, a “freedom timeline,” information and links on patriotism, and photos and information about pets, sports, holidays, and traditions. There are lots of videos, including tours of rooms in the White House and the famous “Barney Cam” movies.

Woodrow, the White House Mouse, 2nd ed. Peter W. Barnes and Cheryl Shaw Barnes. Alexandria, VA: VSP Books, 1998. Grades K-4.

Tells the story of the presidency and the art, architecture, and history of the White House through the adventures of Woodrow G. Washingtall, President of the United Mice of America, and his family. Explains how the president works with Congress and how the president is the commander in chief and head of state.

The Judiciary

Federal Judicial Center

<http://www.fjc.gov/history/home.nsf>

Provides biographies of justices, a timeline of landmark judicial legislation, information on the administration of courts, and other historical and educational materials about the Supreme Court and other federal courts.

Marshall, the Courthouse Mouse: A Tail of the U.S. Supreme Court. Peter W. Barnes and Cheryl Shaw Barnes. Alexandria, VA: VSP Books, 1998. Grades 1-5.

Explains the role of the judicial branch through Chief Justice Marshall Mouse and his fellow justices on the Supreme Court of the United Mice of America. Shows how Court cases arise, how they are argued, and how the justices make a decision.

The Supreme Court. Geoffrey M. Horn. Milwaukee, WI: World Almanac Library, 2003. Grades 5-8.

Covers qualifications for being a justice, how cases are chosen, the process for hearing a case, the role precedents play, and how the federal court system is organized. Discusses famous justices and highlights several landmark cases. Includes a list of justices since 1789 and a list of selected landmark cases; a glossary; a timeline, and an index.

The Supreme Court (Into the Third Century series). Richard B. Bernstein and Jerome Agel. New York: Walker and Company, 1989. Young adults.

A history of the Supreme Court that explores ideas such as judicial review and federalism; introduces people who have shaped our history and our law; and assesses the modern Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court of the United States: A Student Companion, 2nd ed. John J. Patrick. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Young adults.

An encyclopedia-style resource that explains terms related to the Supreme Court. Provides biographies of the justices, summarizes significant decisions, and covers core concepts, legal terms, the Supreme Court building, and procedures and development of the Court.

The U.S. Supreme Court. Muriel L. Dubois. Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2004. Grades K-4.

A very basic explanation of the functions of the U.S. Supreme Court, geared for grade school students. Contains a brief description of the Constitution, explains who can become a Supreme Court justice, and describes the justices' jobs. Includes a glossary.

The Constitution

Constitution Translated for Kids, 3rd ed. Cathy Travis. Austin, TX: Synergy Books, 2006. Grades 4-7.

Provides a line-by-line translation of the U.S. Constitution: the text of the original document is laid out on the left-hand side of the page and accompanying explanatory paragraphs are set out on the right-hand side. Also includes historical context, student exercises, a glossary, and "fast facts." The book was written by a staffer for a U.S. representative.

A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution. Betsy and Giulio Maestro. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1987. Grades 2-4.

Explains why and how the U.S. Constitution was created. Provides a fairly detailed, yet easy-to-understand, account of what happened during the Constitutional Convention, the arguments for and against each of the plans, and what went into drafting and ratifying the Constitution. Then describes why and how the Bill of Rights came about. Contains the text of the Constitution, a summary of the amendments, a list of the signers, and other lists of facts about the Constitution.

Our Constitution. Donald A. Ritchie. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Young adults.

Begins with a background on how and why the U.S. Constitution was created, the rights it protects, how it has expanded over time, and how it is interpreted. Most of the book comprises detailed descriptions of each clause and article of the Constitution, with "what it says" and "what it means" explanations. Contains profiles of important Supreme Court cases, historical anecdotes, texts of related primary source documents, a glossary and index, and terrific illustrations and photos.

Shh! We're Writing the Constitution. Jean Fritz. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1987. Grades 2-5.

Presents a "behind-the-scenes" look at the trials and tribulations of the Founding Fathers as they wrote the U.S. Constitution during the summer of 1787. Weaves into the narrative descriptions of several of the personalities who drafted and debated the Constitution; explains Federalist and Anti-Federalist forces; describes the ratification process; and discusses the debate

over creating a Bill of Rights. Includes the full text of the Constitution.

The U.S. Constitution (Know Your Government series). Donald A. Ritchie. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. Young adults.

Surveys the history of the U.S. Constitution with descriptions of its structure, current function, and influence in our society. Contains a glossary and the text of the Constitution.

We the Kids: The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States. Illustrations and foreword by David Catrow. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 2002. Grades K-5.

An explanation of the preamble to the U.S. Constitution in language that kids can understand. Contains a foreword and an easy-to-understand glossary (“establish justice” means “to make things fair and honest for everyone”), followed by the story of a dog who leads three children on a camping trip. The illustrations relate to each phrase in the preamble.

How Government Works

Ben’s Guide to the U.S. Government for Kids.

<http://bensguide.gpo.gov>

Ben’s Guide is compiled and maintained by the Government Printing Office. It provides information and activities specifically tailored for educators, parents, and students in K-12. Information for students is tailored to grade levels (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12). Depending on the grade level, the site provides information on the following topics: our nation, historical documents, branches of government, how our laws are made, national vs. state government, election process, symbols of U.S. government, citizenship, glossary, and U.S. government Web sites for kids. The links to other government Web sites may be accessed by government agency, by subject, or alphabetically. An extremely useful, well-organized resource.

How the U.S. Government Works. Syl Sobel. Hauppauge, NY: Barron’s Educational Series, 1999. Grades 3-5.

Explains why government is necessary (“Can you imagine what your school would be like if each class had rules that were different from the rules in other classes? . . . And what if the school had no principal?”). Then goes on to describe what the three branches of government do. Readers learn how officials are elected or appointed and how government agencies work for the benefit of the people. Contains a glossary and index.

Social Studies for Kids

<http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/subjects/government.htm>

A portal to other Web sites geared for students that explain the three branches of government and how a bill becomes a law.

U.S. State Department’s Basic Readings in U.S. Democracy (as chosen by Professor Melvin I. Urofsky)

<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/demo.htm>

Provides the full text of more than 70 documents that represent the idea of American

democracy. The documents consist of court decisions, legislative acts, presidential decrees, letters, essays, speeches, and poems—in addition to the “bedrock documents” like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Campaigns and Elections

Presidential Elections and Other Cools Facts, 2nd ed. Syl Sobel. Hauppauge, NY: Barron’s Educational Series, 1999. Grades 3-5.

Explains the rules for electing the president and the rules for voting for a president (age and citizenship requirements, etc.), including the electoral college. Describes the steps in a presidential campaign, from primaries to conventions to election day. Explains the role of the vice president and presidential succession. There are sidebars throughout the book that address topics such as the role of the first lady, third-party candidates, and the oldest and youngest presidents. Contains a glossary, bibliography, and index.

Voice of the People: American Democracy in Action. Betsy Maestro. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1996. Grades K-6.

A wide-ranging book that explains the electoral process and how the three branches of government work. Discusses how the Constitution was drafted and forms the backbone of our government. Also explains that our electoral process has developed in part from the Constitution and in part from customs and traditions. Contains various lists: presidents, order of presidential succession, the oath of office, and more.

Vote! Eileen Christelow. New York: Clarion Books, 2003. Grades K-4.

Using a campaign for mayor as an example, this engaging book covers every step in the process, from the start of the campaign all the way to the voting booth—and even a recount. The cast of characters includes two dogs, whose questions and comments mirror those of young readers and help to explain some of an election’s more confusing aspects. Includes a glossary, a timeline of voting rights, a discussion of political parties, a list of Internet resources, and terrific cartoon-like drawings.

Woodrow for President: A Tail of Voting, Campaigns, and Elections. Peter W. Barnes and Cheryl Shaw Barnes. Alexandria, VA: VSP Books, 1999. Grades K-4.

Shows what is involved in running for elective office as Woodrow Washingtall is elected to local, state, and federal office. Stresses the importance of civic and community involvement, including volunteering, voting, and political participation.

The Story of the United States of America

America: A Patriotic Primer. Lynne Cheney. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002. Grades 2-5.

An ABC book that introduces readers to the founding principles of the United States. Each letter of the alphabet stands for an idea (“S is for Suffrage,” “T is for Tolerance”) or for an historical figure (“J is for Jefferson,” “W is for Washington”). Each idea is illustrated in words,

through quotations from historical sources, and in pictures.

The Fourth of July Story. Alice Dalgliesh. New York: Aladdin Books, 1956, reprint 1995. Grades K-4.

An American classic that describes how the thirteen colonies united for independence, the writing of the Declaration of Independence, carrying the news of independence across the colonies, the war against the British, and the election of George Washington as president.

Give Me Liberty! The Story of the Declaration of Independence. Russell Freedman. New York: Holiday House, 2000. Grades 5 and up.

This abundantly illustrated book covers the Boston Tea Party and the other events that led to the Colonial uprising and revolt. It describes the Second Continental Congress, the formation of the Continental Army, the Battle of Bunker Hill, and the drafting of the Declaration. Also discusses how this "living document" continues to speak anew to each generation. Includes the full text of the Declaration, a list of all its signers, a chronology of events covered in the book's chapters, and the efforts made to protect and preserve the document.

The Journey of the One and Only Declaration of Independence. Judith St. George. New York: Philomel Books, 2005. Grades K-5.

Chronicles the journey of the Declaration of Independence through American history. Since it was signed in 1776, the Declaration has been rolled up, copied, hidden away, and traveled by horseback, sailing vessel, mail truck, railroad car, and military tank. After being front and center of a new nation, it has escaped two British invasions and survived for more than two centuries of both peaceful times and devastating wars.

The Story of the Statue of Liberty. Betsy Maestro. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1986. Grades 2-7.

Describes the creation of the Statue of Liberty given by France to the United States as a remembrance of the old friendship between the two countries, and explains how the statue is a symbol of hope and freedom to people who come to America. Provides a detailed account of how the sculptor came up with the concept and executed the sculpture. Contains lists of additional information about the statue, such as a table of dates, people who helped in the construction, dimensions of the statue, and more.

The Flag

Facts about the United States Flag

<http://www.smithsonian.org/resource/faq/nmah/flag.htm>

Provides an overview of the acts and orders prescribing how the U.S. flag should look, as well as a history of the number of stars and the states they represented.

The Flag We Love. Pam Munoz Ryan. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing, 1996. Grades K-3.

Each left-hand page features a four-line rhymed verse with a box of flag facts underneath,

and a full-page painting on the right. Describes how we use flags and where they fly: at sporting events, over schools and monuments, at ceremonies and funerals, in parades, at our harbors. The illustrations include such moving scenes as the train carrying Lincoln's coffin, the Vietnam War Memorial, and an astronaut walking on the moon with a U.S. flag reflected in his visor.

Red, White, and Blue: The Story of the American Flag. John Herman. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1998. Grades K-3.

From the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, to the pioneer movement to a walk on the moon, the American flag has been there through it all. Explains the history of the flag, including the famed (but not proven) story of Betsy Ross and the first flag. Describes the variety of flags flown during the American Revolution and the various ways that the early stars and stripes were depicted until 1818, when Congress decided that the flag would have thirteen stripes to represent the original colonies and that the field of blue would contain a star for each state.