

LESSON PLAN

"A BILL BECOMES A LAW"



RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL

Middle School



OVERVIEW

This activity is designed to familiarize students with the legislative process. It is also intended to introduce students to legislation currently in the U.S. House of Representatives.



CURRICULUM CONNECTION

- U.S. History, American Government, Social Studies
- U.S. House of Representatives, Legislative Process



OBJECTIVES

1. Students should be able to discuss the legislative process
2. Students should be able to identify current legislation
3. Students should be able to clearly express their opinions regarding current legislation



LESSON PLAN

Day One

1. To help introduce students to the upcoming activity, lead a brief discussion to assess the students' understanding of the legislative process:
 - a. How does a bill become a law? Who is involved?
 - b. Why do we have laws?
 - c. What makes a good law?
2. Ask students to read the content of the How a Bill Becomes a Law lesson for Middle School learners on <http://kids.clerk.house.gov> either independently or in groups. Encourage students to take notes and write down any unanswered questions they encounter.
3. Once students have completed the reading, answer and discuss the Comprehensive Questions and Critical Thinking Questions below as a group.
4. Choose one of the options listed under the category Main Exercise. Students can use the online resources listed at the end of the activity to complete the Main Exercise. Give the students class time to plan their exercises and ask them to complete any required research and writing for homework.

Day Two (Optional)

5. Have students break into groups to discuss their assignment. Allow time for classmates to ask questions.



COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where do ideas for laws come from?
2. What must happen before a bill can be introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives?

3. How is a bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives?
4. What happens to a bill while it is in committee?
5. What can happen to a bill if changes are made to its content while it is in committee?
6. How do members of the U.S. House of Representatives vote on bills?
7. Who must agree to a bill before it can become a law?
8. What can Congress do if a bill is vetoed by the President?



CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important that both the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate agree to a bill before it is sent to the President? Why should the President have a say in which bills become laws?
2. How would a Member's personal experiences effect the way he or she votes on legislation?



MAIN EXERCISE

Option 1: If I were a Member...

1. Assign the students a bill currently on the House floor. Information on current legislation is available at <http://thomas.loc.gov>.
2. Hold a discussion about the main points of the bill:
 - a. Who would this bill help? Would it hurt anyone?
 - b. What would happen if this bill became a law?
 - c. What would change if this bill become a law?
3. Instruct the students to write a letter to their Representative expression their opinion on the bill.
4. Letters can be mailed to the Representative. Member mailing addresses are available at <http://clerk.house.gov>.

Option 2: Writing a Bill

1. Break the class into small groups. Assign each group an issue to research and write into a bill. Some suggestions:
 - a. Making the official start time for high school students 10:00 am.
 - b. Requiring all students to wear uniforms to school.
 - c. Mandating all high school athletes maintain a 3.0 GPA to play sports.
2. Give students time in class to research their topic.
3. The groups should put together a one-to-two page document outlining why the bill would be beneficial.
4. Optional: Have students debate the content of their bills in class.



ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

Office of the Clerk
<http://clerk.house.gov>

Library of Congress/THOMAS
<http://thomas.loc.gov>