



## **Section Six: *Practice Passing Laws***

### **Overview**

Laws and rules are necessary to establish and maintain order in our classes as well as our communities.

Each year tens of thousands of bills are introduced in the Congress of the United States. The same is true for the 50 state legislatures and the 3000 county legislatures and the countless towns and villages in the United States, but our focus here is the national government and the Congress of the United States. The process these bills must undergo is lengthy and complicated, requiring many hours of research and debate and a great deal of trading and compromise. Only a few hundred make the journey from the introduction hopper to committees, to floor action to passage in both houses of the legislature. Those that do are still subject to the approval (or not) of the president. The process is difficult by design allowing many groups, organizations and individual voices to weigh in and possibly influence or defeat what is being proposed. It is democracy, an often messy process that intentionally makes change difficult, slow, and gradual. And it has been working in this country for over 230 years!

### **Civic Concepts**

This activity is designed to engage students in *formulating, promoting, debating, deliberating, compromising and reaching consensus* as they practice the art of self-governance.

### **Key Objective**

To get students to understand that making rules and laws is a complicated process that takes a great deal of deliberation, debate, and compromise.

### **Activity**

**Activity 19:** There Ought to be a Law - *debating and deciding legislation*

## Activity 19: There Ought to be a Law

Debating and deciding legislation.

### Objective

To get students to understand that making laws is a very difficult and time-consuming process.

### Step One

Divide the class into two groups representing the Senate and the House of Representatives. Have one group meet on one side of the room and the other meet on the other side.

### Step Two

Ask each group to consider each of the bills provided. Their work will take place in two parts. In part one, the students will be acting as members of “subject committees.” These are sub-committees of the larger body of Congress and it is their job to give the bill introduced to Congress the first look over. In these committees decisions are made about whether the bill should “die” there in committee, or be passed on to the full body for consideration. Ask your students to consider each of the six bills before the committee and to decide which four should be killed in committee and which two should be passed along to the full Congress.

### Step Three

When the process is complete, each of the two sub committees will have two bills up for consideration. Hopefully, the committees will have selected at least one bill that matches one passed through by the other committee. If not, they must go back to the committee and make a new set of selections. Students should be encouraged to debate and “argue” over which bills they think should advance. Compromise and deal making should be encouraged.

### **BILLS up for consideration this session:**

- S.123 *Standardization of Bedtimes*
- S.456 *Addition of 6-Hour School Day on Saturday*
- S.789 *Keeping of Sidewalks Clear*
  
- H.123 *Taxation of Childhood Income*
- H.456 *Consumption of Vegetables*
- H.789 *Early Dismissal for Good Students*

## **Extension Activity Ideas**

- 1) Contact the office of your local Congressional or State Representative and ask them for a list of pending legislation. Ask your students to research the bill and consider the following: who proposed it?, who supports and opposes it?, why was the bill put forth? What is the bill intended to do?
- 2) Invite your local representative into your class or school to describe their job and their role in how a bill becomes a law.

## **NOTES**

Classroom  
1st Senate

# S. 123

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In the Classroom of \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## **A Bill**

For the Standardization of Student Bedtimes

- 1 To provide for the general welfare by requiring all parents to prevent their children from
- 2 watching television, using their phones or computers or any other electronic devices after
- 3 7:00 pm and to be ready for, and in bed with the lights out, by 8:30 pm on any night
- 4 when the following day is a school day.

Classroom  
1st Senate

# S. 456

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In the Classroom of \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## **A Bill**

For the Addition of 6-Hour School Day on Saturday

- 1 To provide for the general welfare by requiring all students with a grade average
- 2 of 85 or B or lower to attend school for an additional 6-hour school day on Saturdays.

Classroom  
1st Senate

# S. 789

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In the Classroom of \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## **A Bill**

For the Keeping of Sidewalks Clear

- 1 To provide for the general welfare by requiring residents and businesses
- 2 to keep all sidewalks in front of their property clear of snow, loose gravel
- 3 or rocks, sticks, leaves, and all other miscellaneous items at all times.

Classroom  
1st House

# H. 123

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In the Classroom of \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## **A Bill**

For the Taxation of Childhood Income

- 1 To promote the general welfare by requiring all students in the third grade or above to
- 2 turn over 75% of any money they get for their birthdays, holidays, from the tooth fairy,
- 3 their grandmas and grandpas, or money that they earn from miscellaneous small jobs
- 4 around the house or neighborhood to their parents as thanks for providing them with a
- 5 place to live and food to eat.

Classroom  
1st House

# H. 456

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In the Classroom of \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## **A Bill**

For the Consumption of Vegetables

- 1 To provide for the general welfare by requiring all students who attend school
- 2 to eat at least three cooked vegetables as part of their lunch every day.



Classroom  
1st House

# H. 789

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In the Classroom of \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## **A Bill**

For Early Dismissal for Good Students

- 1 To provide for the general welfare by allowing all students with a grade average of 85 or
- 2 B or better to have an extended lunch period and to be dismissed from school 30 minutes
- 3 before the other students.

## Legislature Background for the Students

Explain to the students that the structure and function of the American legislative system, or Congress, is laid-out in Article I of the Constitution. The founders, still smarting from the abuses of the British Royalty, wanted to put as little power in as many hands as possible so as to avoid a repeat situation. They split the Congress into two groups, or houses, and gave each a unique set of powers and responsibilities (this is called the “separation of powers”). They also gave each house the power to influence, limit, or block the actions of the other house (this is called “checks and balances”).

### Examples

- The Congress passes bills and the President can sign them into law or veto them.
- The President appoints ambassadors and justices to the Supreme Court but Congress must approve them.
- The Supreme Court can declare laws passed by the Congress and signed by the President unconstitutional.

The Senate is considered the “upper” house. Members there serve six year terms and represent the entire population of the state. Each state, whether they are large or small, has two United States Senators in the Congress. The House of Representatives is considered the “lower” house. Members there serve two-year terms and represent districts determined and set up within the states every ten years based upon the results of the national census. The number of Congressional Districts in a state depends on the number of people who live in the state. New York State currently has 27 Congressional Districts.

In order for a bill to become a law it must gain the support of the majority of members in each of the two houses, or chambers, of Congress. In addition, the versions passed by each must be exactly identical. If the two chambers pass bills that differ, a special committee called a “conference committee” - made up of members from each chamber - must meet to iron out the differences and make the two versions exactly identical before it can be presented to the president.

All bills must be presented to the President, who will then decide whether to sign the bill, thereby making it a law, or “veto” the bill which means the bill is “dead.”