

Lesson Plan Part I –Participating in Government as a Citizen

Annotation: In this lesson, students will experience how the legislative process works and the influence of individual citizens. They will use appropriate letter writing and paragraph form to write thank you letters to their state legislators for their past support of high ability education. In the letters, students will utilize the elements of persuasive writing and their own experiences to ask for continued support for required high ability programming and funding.

Student Learning Outcomes or Objectives:

- Students will be able to explain the process of how a bill becomes a law in Indiana.
- Students will identify their own state representatives and senators.
- Students will demonstrate the correct way to provide input to decision makers on a public issue.
- Students will demonstrate proper letter form by writing a letter to their legislator(s) thanking them for their past support of high ability education.
- Students will use elements of persuasive writing to ask for continued support of high ability education.

Standards:

These will vary by grade level of the students, and some of these may be above grade level. Some will be in the Civics and Government section of the Social Studies Standards; some will be in the Writing section of the English Language Arts Standards.

Total Duration: At least one class period, but this can vary with teacher choice and age of the students.

Materials, Websites, and Equipment Needed:

- Where to find the elected officials in Indiana for a given street address:
<https://www.in.gov/sos/elections/2681.htm>
- To determine Indiana General Assembly members of the Education Committee (House of Representatives) or the Education and Career Development Committee (Senate), go to:
<http://iga.in.gov/legislative/2024/committees/standing>
- Where to find the Indiana Constitutional process for bills becoming a law:
<https://www.in.gov/gov/files/BillintoLaw.pdf>
- If you would like to use a different or additional graphic from the one mentioned above for How a Bill Becomes a Law in Indiana, search: “images for how a bill becomes a law in Indiana”. Some good choices there are ones developed by the American Civil Liberties Union or the Indiana State Teachers Association.
- If technology is not available to students individually, this part of the lesson can be done as a group (it is likely students will live in the same state districts).
- If submitting in hard copy, students will need appropriate paper, business envelopes, and stamps for writing or printing their letters.

Guiding Questions:

- **How does a bill become a law?**
- **How and why do you contact your legislator?**
- **How do you convey appreciation in a letter?**
- **How do you persuade in a letter?**

Lesson and Learning Activities

Background and Introduction (teacher discretion on how much of this is shared with students): It is important for us to understand the process of how ideas become bills and bills become laws in Indiana. We will do that by learning something about the history of support for gifted education in Indiana. In the mid 1950's, some school districts in Indiana were offering special classes or other opportunities for those students who learned more quickly than other students, allowing them to move ahead to new topics after they had mastered the regular curriculum. These districts wanted the Indiana Department of Education to provide some additional financial support for more advanced materials and teacher training in knowing what to do to encourage and develop those students. Other states were in similar situations and the federal government began to become more involved in public education, including recognizing the need to encourage students to take more math and science. In the mid 1970's, the federal government acknowledged that students with disabilities, both physical and educational, sometimes needed something different from the regular curriculum. Thus, the idea emerged of requiring a range of educational experiences to meet the differing needs of children. Aside from some early support to states for studying whether or not such services were needed, federal support did not extend to requiring districts to support students who excelled and needed more advanced curriculum. Gradually, progress was made in addressing those needs at the state level, first through the Indiana General Assembly designating some state funds specifically for the extra expenses school districts might have to provide advanced courses and through support from the Indiana Department of Education to offer teacher training and help to districts in setting up programs for these advanced learners. Stakeholders in this effort with the Indiana General Assembly Representatives and Senators included the students themselves, their parents, their teachers, and the district administrators that worked to design the programs. However, the existence and quality of the programs being provided to the students depended from year to year on the individual district's budgets and their leaders' willingness to provide services. Students and parents in the districts with few services were frustrated that student needs were not being met.

Throughout the 1990's and early 2000's, parents, teachers, students, and advocates from the Indiana Association for the Gifted worked together to contact all of the legislators to explain why these programs should be in every school in Indiana. They were not always successful in getting various bills proposed and were not always successful in getting bills passed, but they kept trying. They told their stories to their local legislators and eventually, in 2007, then Governor Mitch Daniels signed into law that all school districts in Indiana must identify students with high ability in core content areas and provide them with appropriate programming to develop their abilities. This Bill was passed and voted for by every senator and every representative; it was unanimous! To help the schools implement this new requirement, the legislature doubled the previous funding to each district specifically to be used for high ability students. These new requirements and funding came with the responsibility for each district to report to the Indiana Department of Education about what they were doing for these students, how the students were doing, and show that they spent the money specifically for the high ability programs. It is an important part of the legislative process for the legislators to know that their votes made a positive difference for those in the areas they represent. **Our job is to write to our personal legislators and thank them for their past and continued support for high ability education.**

Teach or Review: How a Bill Becomes a Law in Indiana – use the website provided and possibly a graphic as listed above under Materials.

Teach: How to write a thank you letter.

In the salutation, write: Dear Representative (last name);, e.g., Dear Representative Thompson:

How to address a legislator on an envelope. Elected Indiana State legislators are to be addressed as “The Honorable (full name)” For example: The Honorable Jeff Thompson. Then, on an envelope it would be the full title followed by the correct street address.

The Honorable Jeff Thompson,
Indiana House of Representatives, The Statehouse
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Identify: legislators who are on the Education Committees in the Indiana Senate and Indiana House of Representatives. The website is listed above.

Student Work Groups: Have students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

Activity:

- Identify their Representative and their Senator.
- Check to see if they are on the Education Committee for their chamber.
- If their legislator is on one of the Education Committees, they can mention that when they write their letter, thanking them for their past and current support.
- If they are not on one of the Education Committees, they can still thank their legislator for past support and ask them to encourage their colleagues on the Committees to support any bills to keep or improve high ability programs when they are in committee. All legislators can support bills when they advance out of committee to the full chamber.
- When writing the letter, identify who you are, what grade you are in, where you live and go to school, and why you are writing. In the body of the letter, thank them for supporting high ability. Include an explanation of why this is a matter of importance for you; give specific examples. Write persuasively when asking for their support. For example, you could tell them why you appreciate the high ability programming, why you think schools should be required to provide additional challenge for high ability students, why schools should have to report to the state about how they are providing programming and how the district spent the money targeted for high ability, and how well the students are performing in advanced work.
- Treat your first effort as a draft. Work with your classmates and teacher to revise your letter to be as professional and effective as possible. You are being a spokesperson for high ability education. You want them to respect the education you are receiving.

Follow up: Invite your senator and representative to visit your class to talk about their work in the legislature and for them to see your work as a high ability student.

Part II – Extension - Problem Based Learning

Annotation: Students are given an authentic scenario and an authentic audience in which they must prepare testimony for the legislative committee process. This lesson can be done independently or as an extension of the Part I lesson.

Objectives:

- Students will follow the process of how a bill becomes a law in Indiana or how funding is increased (or both).
- Students will demonstrate the correct way to provide input in the form of testimony to decision makers on a public issue.
- Students will demonstrate appropriate respect and proper speaking form in creating testimony to an Indiana General Assembly Committee hearing.
- Students will use elements of persuasion to ask for continued support and/or increased funding for high ability education.
- Students will create a short, succinct video to make their case for high ability education.

Standards:

These will vary by grade level of the students, and some of these may be above grade level. Some will be in the Civics and Government section of the Social Studies Standards; some will be in the Writing section of the English Language Arts Standards.

Total Duration: Estimated to be a minimum of three lessons, but this can vary with teacher choice of the methods they will use and age of the students.

Materials, Websites, and Equipment Needed:

Indiana Code and Rules related to High Ability Education (downloaded from the Indiana Association for the Gifted website)

Possible use of video recording of student testimony.

Activities:

Scenario: You are high ability students. Your representative or senator in The Indiana General Assembly is considering a proposal to “Eliminate, reduce, or streamline” some currently required programs including requiring schools to have high ability programs. Your elected person is interested in understanding the value of high ability classes and has asked your class for help. How can your group or class succinctly and effectively explain the value of high ability education and voice your support?

- Have students work in pairs or small groups.
- Problems that may surface and ideas the teacher might suggest at appropriate times:
 - Students cannot be available to go to testify in person on short notice before the Education Committees during the regular session (January – April, 2022) or during

the Interim Study Committee of 2021(August – September). Dates for particular topics are not always known in advance and can be changed on short notice. Consider written testimony or video testimony that could be presented by someone else in the actual hearing.

- o Teacher may want to check on statehouse protocols and on available technology. If planning to do this, contact the Indiana Association for the Gifted’s Advocacy Chair. Direct inquiries to advocacy@iag-online.org

- If students want to testify orally on audio, or to submit written testimony, they should:
 - o Register in writing with the legislative personnel before the meeting begins. In this, the person will write down on a form their name, their position and organization, and whether they want to speak for or against the bill that is being discussed.
 - o When called upon to speak, begin remarks this way:

Chairman (name) and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak (in favor or against) (Senate or House) Bill #. My name is (your name) and I am a (fourth) grade student in the high ability program at (name of school) in (name of district). We are studying how bills become laws and how to properly and respectfully provide input into the decision making of our government. (then make your points succinctly). (At the close of your testimony), thank you again for this opportunity.