

Did My Bill Pass?

A Model Legislature



I Guides

- Teacher's Guide
- Student Instructions

II Party, Region and Committee Forms, Region Maps and Charts

- Party and Region Setup Forms
- Region Data Sheets
- Region Maps and Charts
- Committee Description and Setup

III Bill Writing and Setup Format and Samples

- Bill Coversheet
- Bill Writing Rubric
- Bill Format and Sample
- How to Amend a Bill
- Good Bill/Bad Bill

IV Forms and Samples

- Instructions and Bill Log
- Committee Chair Instructions
- Secretary Instructions
- Minutes
- Roberts Rules of Order
- Class and Individual Surveys
- Congressional Seating

V Appendix

Assessment Tools

- Teacher Grade Sheet
- Peer Assessment
- Self Assessment
- Activity Evaluation

Standards

- California, National and Common Core

Did My Bill Pass? A Model Legislature¹

Introduction

This activity simulates the workings of Congress. It follows as closely as is practical the way Congress actually operates. The students are divided into Democrats and Republicans in the same proportion as in the U.S. Congress. Ideally, two classes will work together—one acting as the Senate and the other as the House of Representatives (the House). You can either work with another teacher or have one of your classes be the House and another be the Senate. Both work well. If this is not feasible, then you can choose which chamber works best for you.

The students elect congressional leaders, represent regions of the U.S., write bills, serve on committees, politic to get their bills passed and deal with lobbyists. If you're using the two-class format, any bills that make it through one chamber move on to the other. Any bills that are passed by both chambers but are not identical go to a House-Senate conference committee. As the current president, you sign or veto any bills that complete the entire process. (Have fun! Act as you think our president really would.)

Time Required

The simulation takes about ten 50-minute blocks, with much flexibility built in. You can do the activity every day, or, as I recommend, intersperse it with your lectures and quizzes. (I do a unit on the legislative branch at the same time.) The simulation works especially well when integrated with news of what the U.S. Congress is actually doing.

Preparation

A couple of days before beginning the simulation, you should do several things:

1. Find out something about your students' political leanings. The packet includes two methods for doing this.
2. Decide whether to be the House or the Senate.
3. Go over key terms and other legislative basics, such as how a bill becomes law.
4. Do the good bill/bad bill activity. There are three bill samples in this packet. One is a short bill on affordable housing. While it doesn't cover everything, it does contain clear provisions and money to pay for itself. The other two—"Clean Up the Bay" and "Stop Teenage Smoking"—are vague policy statements and lack enforcement provisions. Go through these bills. Then have your students write a practice bill on something in the newspaper or that pertains to their school or personal lives (e.g., an open campus, better food, longer library hours). Pick one bill that is good but needs editing. Put it on the overhead, and with the class, go through it sentence by sentence. (This models good editing practices and attention to language detail.)

Doing this activity is important. Most students do NOT know how to write enforceable provisions. Spending time getting your students to understand the difference between policy and provision will result in better bills and a better outcome (see Tab III, for a "Bill Writing Rubric").

¹ Excerpted.
Copyright © 2005–2011 Carla Young Garrett

Did My Bill Pass?

Student Instructions*

INTRODUCTION

For the next couple of weeks you will be a member of Congress, serving as either a Democrat, a Republican or an independent and representing a region of the U.S.. Your congressional duties include drafting bills, sitting on a committee, and participating in full Senate or House sessions.¹

After you have chosen or been assigned to a political party and a region, the first item of business in this _____ Congress _____ session is to select party leaders. The two caucuses (parties) will meet and elect the leaders:

In the U.S. Congress, these leaders are usually the ones with the most seniority (been there the longest). They have much power and are good at parliamentary maneuvers and persuading other members to vote their way. Your student leaders are in charge, so choose classmates with good powers of persuasion and other leadership qualities.

PARTY MEETING

Once the leaders have been selected, the parties strategize and draw up legislative goals for this Congress. Members have the opportunity at this time to say on which committee they would like to serve and what issues they're going to write bills on. Members may also meet with other representatives from their region to discuss common goals. Each morning there may be a brief party strategy meeting.

WRITING BILLS

Each member must author at least _____ bill(s) You will receive a bill-writing rubric and a format/sample for writing your bills. Here are some bill-writing tips.

- What's your bill going to be about? Give it a name that will show at a glance what's it's about. The sample bill is called, "Affordable Housing Plan"
- In the "purpose" section give a short summary of what your bill will accomplish and why that is important. This is a "policy statement." (Ex. "To build good quality, affordable housing for low income families.")

As you begin to write the bill's "provisions"—the body of the bill—ask yourself the following questions:

- Is what I am writing a policy statement? (i.e. "We need to clean up the Bay."). If so, it can only go in the 'purpose' section and not in body of the bill. The body is where you spell out, in detail, how you are going to accomplish your policy goals. . . .
- Is my language clear and precise?
- Did I provide money to pay for the bill's provision?
- Does my bill make something illegal? If so, the language must be clear so that a person reading the bill would know where the line between legal and illegal is. . . .
- Does my bill provide for punishment for wrong-doers? If so, what kind of punishment (fines, jail, requirement to fix the problem?). . . .

INTRODUCING BILLS

First thing each class period any new or rewritten bill (with the number of copies specified by your teacher) must be "dropped into the hopper" for use that day. Members generally write bills about issues that affect their constituency (the voters and businesses in their district).

*Excerpted.

Bill Format and Sample

___th CONGRESS
___ Session

HR or S _____
(leave blank for stamp)

Date: _____

Title	AFFORDABLE HOUSING PLAN
Author(s)	June Sommers (D-New Sylvania)
Purpose	To build good quality, affordable housing for low income families.
Provisions	<p>This bill increases personal and corporate income taxes in each tax bracket by one quarter of one percent for a one year period, beginning January 1 of the year that follows passage of this bill. The entire amount of the increase will go to fund:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Construction of new housing in areas designated by each region.2. Rehabilitation of existing housing, particularly in urban areas, as designated by each region. <p>This additional tax revenue is calculated by adding a line to the 1040, 1040EZ, 1040A and 1120, whereby the total tax amount due is multiplied by one quarter of one percent. The amount on this line will go to the Department of Health and Human Services for disbursement. Regions will be able to obtain monies from this fund after completing and submitting an application, and after said application is approved by the Department.</p>
Definitions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. "Urban areas" are defined as incorporated areas having more than 100,000 people.2. "Low cost housing" is defined as housing that has a monthly payment that does not exceed 28% of a family's gross monthly income.
Constitutional Authority	Article I §8 ¶1 (Taxation)
Effective Date	This bill goes into effect on January 1, _____.
Author/Sponsor Signature(s)	<u>June Sommers</u>