

MITCH BEATY
UT EXTENSION

How a Bill Becomes a Law “Bill’s Journey”

DESCRIPTION

For 6th through 8th grade students.

This is a lesson designed to help students better understand the how a bill in Congress becomes a law. The lesson takes an interactive approach to breaking down and this process in a simple way which is easy to understand and remember. It is designed to be used in conjunction with the School House Rock Video “I’m Just a Bill.” However it can be taught easily without it.

OBJECTIVES

To help students to better understand the bill to law process and how it works. As a secondary objective it introduces students to two of the three branches of government.

TIME REQUIRED TO DELIVER LESSON

One class period of up to 45-55 minutes. The lesson can be simplified to a 15 to 20 minute session or expanded to longer session depending on the time available.

OPENING IDEAS and DISCUSSION

Start by saying:

- “What are some laws?” “Where do laws come from?”
- “What is a law? A law is just a rule which helps people work and live together.”
- Well we are going to learn more about this process over the next few minutes.
- Optional: “I’m going to start by playing a Schoolhouse Rock video about the Bills.”
- Play “I’m just a Bill” 3minutes

BODY OF LESSON

- Pass out all of the Pieces, there are 18. (One of the pieces is a picture of Lincoln Davis of Tennessee’s 4th Congressional District. This picture may be changed to a congressman which represents your county. This can easily be done by simply finding your congressman’s picture on the web. If you have problems please feel free to contact me concerning this.)
- “As you may have guessed, laws come from bills. So let’s look out how that process happens.”
- “First of all there needs to be group of people who have concerns and a reason for us to have laws. These people are called constituents... but really they are just citizens.

Here is an example of a group of constituents... does anyone know who this group is missing? You! You are all citizens of this country and can take your concerns to your lawmakers.”

- “The first thing that needs to happen is a citizen or group of citizens have an idea about a concern that they may have .“Does Anyone have a piece that looks like an idea? (Bring up light bulb)”
- **Optional Idea here would be to create a law from an idea that the students have.**
 - *“Lets come up with a concern that we think might need to be addressed.”*
 - *Facilitate some ideas (remember they need to National... but they can be anything...and they can be simple so they can understand. Take a few ideas and vote on which one is best.*
 - *Some examples could be:*
 - *Students must get 1 hour of PE each day.*
 - *High School athletes have to be tested regularly for steroids.*
 - *Teenage drivers cannot talk on cell phones while driving.*
- “Ideas are great to have, but unless we have a process to transform that idea into practice...it really doesn’t help us much... so what is our next step? “We take our idea to our lawmakers... today we are going to use an example of a National Law... so we will take it to our local Congressman. Our congressmen work in Washington DC but they have offices back in their home Districts were citizens can meet with them or their staffs to express concerns.” So we can take our concerns to our local Congressional Office ...does anyone have an “idea” arrow? (Bring up idea arrow)
- “Tennessee has 9 US Representatives or Congressmen (although one Marsha Blackburn.. is referred to as a “Congresswoman”)... does anyone know the name of our Congressman? Our Congressman is Lincoln Davis who serves the 4th Congressional District of Tennessee. **(Again, change this depending upon what Congressional District your County is in, you may also change the picture)**. He represents about 700,000 people. “Does anyone have his picture?” (Bring up congressman)
- “Our Congressman now takes our idea and writes it down in legal language. Does anyone know what this document is called when he gets done? It is called a Bill (Bring up Bill Piece)...
- So this is our Bill... Does anyone know where it goes from here...?” “It goes to committee...does anyone have an arrow that has the word Sponsor on it?” (Bring up Sponsor Arrow) It says sponsor because the Congressman is said to sponsor the bill when he sends it to committee.”
- “This is also a picture of a congressional committee.” It is located in one of the congressional office buildings in Washington (The Cannon Office Building is pictured above) ...notice there are a lot of lawmakers in there...Does anyone know what will happen in the Committee? There will be a lot of debate. (Bring up debate piece)
- “Does anyone know what the term debate means?” “Its really just a civil argument.”
- “Does anyone know why Congressmen would argue about a bill.?” “Congressmen represent people from different parts of the country with different interests.They may

also make changes to parts of the Bill to make it better for everybody..and easier to pass.”

- “There is no guarantee our Bill will be agreed on by the committee.” If it does not get out of ...or pass through the committee the bill is said to what? Die in committee...(Bring up that piece) If that happens our bill goes to the ole “Bill Graveyard.” Many bills end up here.”
- “Where does the bill go if it passes committee?” To the House Floor. Does anyone have an arrow that tells where the Bill goes?” (Bring up “to the House” Arrow)
- “What happens to the bill on the House Floor?” “They vote on it.” If it fails what happens? It goes to the Bill Graveyard.” (Bring up Dies in the House Piece)
- But if it passes where does it go? It moves over to the Senate Side” (Bring up To the Senate Arrow)
- “So the Bill has to pass the Senate just like it did in the house. If it does not pass the senate what happens.” It dies in the Senate.” (Bring up the dies in Senate Arrow) “Back to the ole Bill Graveyard.”
- If it does pass the Senate does anyone know what happens? It goes to the President to be signed into law.... (Bring up the two arrows to the president.
- “Now does the president have to sign it? No. If he doesn’t what is that called?...a Veto. (Bring up Veto Arrow)
- “Where does the Bill go if it’s a Veto...back to Congress... Two things can happen to the bill at this point. If the Bill passes both houses of Congress by a 2/3 majority then it can still become a law...that is called a what? An over ride. (Bring up Over Ride Arrow).
- If it fails to get the 2/3 majority in either the House or the Senate it goes where? That’s right back to the Bill Graveyard it is said to die of old age...” (Bring up that piece.)
- Say:
- “So if the Bill is either signed by the president or if there is an over ride... what happens? The Bill becomes a law.
- (Bring up that piece) “Notice how happy our new law looks!”
- Any Questions?

HANDOUT

- See Handout and Key.