

Beth Deere
Lexington Middle School
Lexington

Unit: U.S. Government

Lesson Title: Classroom Congress

Grade Level: 8

Era: 3-Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820)

Lesson Time: 4-5 days for a one hour class

TN Standards:

- 8.4.spi.1 Identify the rights, responsibilities & privileges of a member of the United States of America
- 8.4.spi.2 identify the purposes & structures of various systems of governance
- 8.4.spi.3 recognize the purpose of government & how its powers are acquired, used, & justified
- 8.4.spi.5 identify how conditions, actions, & motivations contribute to conflict and cooperation between states, regions, & nations
- 8.4.spi.6 recognize the rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights
- 8.4.spi.8 recognize how a right must be interpreted to balance individual rights with the need for order

Materials: Copy of Constitution, Copy of Bill of Rights, Textbook, Internet
Volunteer Voices referenced:

Constitution and Declaration of Rights of the State of Frankland
(Franklin) Tennessee Historical Society Collection

URL: <http://idserver.utk.edu/?id=200700000002605>

File name: 0028_000050_000229_0000

Lesson:

1. Spend 1-2 days discussing the Constitution (Article I) and the requirements for Congressional members. Also discuss Bill of Rights & the civil liberties that must be protected when making laws.
2. Allow students to elect a President & a Vice President.
3. Divide students into Senators & Representatives. Allow the House of Representatives to elect their Speaker of the House. The Vice President will preside over the Senate.
4. Further divide the “Senate” and the “House” into committees, such as Ways & Means Committee, Education Committee, etc.
5. Students will then sponsor “bills” that will be introduced, sent to committee, debated, refined, & voted on. “Bills” must not violate any constitutional rights.
6. After bills are voted on in one house, they must be passed to the other house where the process begins again. Bills do not become “law” until both houses have passed the bill with a simple majority and the President signs them.
7. When several bills have been passed, they are sent to the President who will sign them or veto them. If laws are vetoed, they must go back to Congress where they must be revised & passed with a 2/3 majority vote of both houses. Otherwise, the bill dies.

8. On the last day of the activity, allow the students to discuss the laws they have created.

Assessment:

- Students will create posters of their new “laws”, noting the sponsoring legislator, the committee that worked on it, the vote tally from both houses, & a brief explanation of why they believe that law to be important.
- Laws should then be posted in a prominent place in the school for others to view.

Supplemental Activities:

1. Arrange for students to tour the state capital & sit in on a lawmaking session of Congress.
2. Invite your local Congressperson into your classroom to discuss the lawmaking process with the students.

I have used this activity each year I've taught American History. It not only gives the students first hand knowledge of how we get our laws, but it makes them think about current issues & how they are affected by them. My students love this activity! It's a lot of work & can get very chaotic, but the first-hand experience they gain from it outweighs the bad.