

FOLLOW THAT LEGISLATION!

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Purpose

This lesson helps students understand the legislative process while also giving them the opportunity to find ways to remain informed about legislative issues that are important to them. Using various websites that offer timely, even sometimes up-to-the-minute information about current legislation, students can enjoy a more meaningful learning experience regarding the legislative process and hopefully become more informed and politically active citizens. If students find out about relevant legislation, it may encourage them to take action to promote policies that they believe will benefit them and their community, thus becoming truly productive citizens.

Objective

Using Congress.gov, students will research a chosen piece of legislation and follow it through the legislative process. They will then evaluate the value and benefit of the legislation and determine if they think that it will be a positive step for their own community or even their state. They will also track how their particular lawmakers in Congress vote on the legislation, thus being able to evaluate how well their elected officials represent their constituencies. Students will create a presentation to share with the class and inform their peers about legislation that may be affecting them.

SC State Standards and Indicators:

USG-3.2 Evaluate the formal and informal structure, role, responsibilities, and authority of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the national government as the embodiments of constitutional principles.

20th Century Skills for Social Studies:

D2.Civ.11.9-12. Evaluate multiple procedures for making governmental decisions at the local, state, national, and international levels in terms of the civic purposes achieved.

D2.Civ.12.9-12. Analyze how people use and challenge local, state, national, and international laws to address a variety of public issues.

D2.Civ.13.9-12. Evaluate public policies in terms of intended and unintended outcomes, and related consequences.

Grade Level: Grades 9-12, Civics or Government classes

Time: Several class periods. The timeframe may be determined by the teacher in choosing whether to track a bill that is still going through the steps toward being signed into law, or to choose legislation that has already moved through Congress and gained final approval. The teacher may also decide whether to allow time in class to learn how to navigate the necessary webpages in order to gather the proper information.

Configuration: This may be done in small groups or individually.

Procedure:

1 Day: With the whole class, show students how to navigate the United State Congress' website to find information needed to complete their research. See the attached document "*Finding What You Need From Congress.gov*" as a quick guide to navigating that website.

2 to 4 Days: Allow students to use Congress.gov to locate their particular elected officials in the Senate and the House of Representatives and fill out a general fact sheet on each elected official (Use the attached form). Allow students to brainstorm topics and issues that they think are important to consider when deciding upon a piece of legislation to follow, then have them identify what piece of legislation they are going to choose,

either individually or in small groups. They can begin gathering information on their chosen bill and working on organizing their findings. You may need to allow more time for students to gather their information. You may require students to do some background research on the issue regarding the bill that they have chosen, in which case they will need some time to gather background information.

1 to 2 Days: Students will work on their presentations and prepare to share their findings with the class. You may choose to offer students some menu choices on how to present their findings.

Assessment: Student presentations and evaluations of the legislation that they have chosen.

Extensions and Adaptations:

- Have students create brief opinion polls and sample the student population at their school or even the general community about their chosen legislation. Then have them analyze their findings and determine how a particular population feels about the legislation.
- Have students write letters to their elected officials asking for information regarding the elected officials' thoughts on the legislation from the point of view of a member of Congress.
- Have students collect news releases that relate to their legislation and comment on whether the legislation accomplishes its goal.

Attached Documents:

- *"Finding What You Need From Congress.gov"*
- *"Who Are Our Elected Officials in Washington?"*
- *"Legislation Research Form"*

Finding What You Need From Congress.gov

Step 1- go to <https://www.congress.gov>

The screenshot shows the Congress.gov homepage. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for Legislation, Congressional Record, Committees, Members, Browse, About, Glossary, Resources, Help, and Contact Us. A "Sign In" link is in the top right corner. Below the navigation is a search bar with a dropdown menu for "Current Legislation" and a search input field containing "Examples: hr5, sres9, 'health care'". To the right of the search bar are links for "Advanced" and "Tips".

Below the search bar, there are two main sections: "Most-Viewed Bills" and "Bill Searches and Lists".

Most-Viewed Bills

- [H.J.Res. 124](#) [113th] Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2015
- [H.R. 1091](#) [113th] Life at Conception Act
- [S.84](#) [113th] Paycheck Fairness Act

Bill Searches and Lists

- [Introduced](#) | [Public Laws](#) 113th Congress (2013-2014)
- [Active Legislation](#) (Senate.gov Finding Aid)
- [Appropriations](#)

Below these sections, there are social media and utility links: Print, Subscribe, Share/Save, and Give Feedback.

The main content area is divided into three columns:

- Current Legislative Activities** (113th Congress (2013-2014))
 - House of Representatives**: [Not in Session Video Archive](#). Next Meeting: Nov. 12, 2014. Previous Meeting: Sept. 19, 2014.
 - Senate**: [Not in Session Video Archive](#). Next Meeting: Oct. 15, 2014. Previous Meeting: Sept. 18, 2014.
- The Legislative Process**: [Nine videos explain each of the common legislative stages](#), and that the process by which a bill becomes law is rarely predictable. Includes a diagram titled "Overview of the Legislative Process" showing the flow from Introduction & Referral of Bills to Committee Consideration and Public Law.
- Treaties**: [Search for treaties](#) on the THOMAS site.
- News and Programs**: [The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom](#), [Magna Carta & the American](#)

The first thing that you and your students need to do is to create an account. This will enable you to save searches and do many helpful things that will help you build your research. If you click the “Sign In” link in the upper right corner of the page, you can register and then be able to save your searches.

Step 2 – Spend some time exploring current legislation. (note: There are also several helpful videos on Legislative Process that you can show your students before starting the actual research.) There is a convenient search window that is easily used.

This is an identical screenshot of the Congress.gov homepage as shown above. It displays the navigation menu, search bar, and various legislative activity sections.

To search for legislation, if you are not sure what to look for, you can click on one of the links under “Bill Searches and Lists,” which will take you to another page where you can narrow down your search by various criteria. For example, you can look for bills by issue such as “Healthcare” or “Environmental Protection.” You then narrow down your search criteria to focus on a particular piece of legislation that interests you. You can also choose to narrow your search to bills that have already been signed into law. This enables you to shorten the time it will take to complete this lesson.

Emergency Management	[3]
Environmental Protection	[3]
Science, Technology, Communications	[3]
Congress	[2]
Finance and Financial Sector	[2]
Labor and Employment	[2]
Law	[2]
Agriculture and Food	[1]
Arts, Culture, Religion	[1]
Civil Rights and Liberties, Minority Issues	[1]
Education	[1]
Housing and Community Development	[1]

[Show Less >](#)

You will see how many bills related to your chosen topic. For example, in the picture to the left, you will see that there were 3 bills that passed relating to Environmental Protection, and one that related to Education.

If you click on one of the topics, you will be presented with those bills (see image below).

In the image below, note that you have a great deal of information relating to who introduced the bill, and how it moved through its journey to becoming a law. You can click on the link to the law and see its actual content then.

1-1 of 1

Sort by



GO

Results per page



GO

LAW

[H.R.1911](#) — 113th Congress (2013-2014)

Bipartisan Student Loan Certainty Act of 2013

Sponsor: [Rep. Kline, John \[R-MN-2\]](#) (Introduced 05/09/2013)

Committees: House - Education and the Workforce, Budget

Committee Reports: [H. Rept. 113-82](#)

Latest Action: 08/09/2013 Became Public Law No: 113-28.

Tracker: [Introduced](#) > [Passed House](#) > [Passed Senate](#) > [Resolving Differences](#) > [To President](#) > [Became Law](#)

1

Results per page



GO

Who Are Our Elected Officials in Washington?

Using information from <https://congress.gov> , find out information about your elected officials in Washington and complete this fact sheet.

Senators From My State:

Senator _____

Native of _____

Political Party _____

Age ____ Gender _____

Attach a Photo Here

Senator _____

Native of _____

Political Party _____

Age ____ Gender _____

Attach a Photo Here

Members of the House of Representatives From My State:

District # ____

Representative _____

Native of _____

Political Party _____

Age ____ Gender _____ (Attach a photo, if you want)

District # ____

Representative _____

Native of _____

Political Party _____

Age ____ Gender _____

District # _____
Representative _____
Native of _____
Political Party _____
Age ____ Gender _____



District # _____
Representative _____
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District # _____
Representative _____
Native of _____
Political Party _____
Age ____ Gender _____



District # _____
Representative _____
Native of _____
Political Party _____
Age ____ Gender _____



Legislation Research Form

Use information from <https://congress.gov> to complete the following information. Be sure to sign up for an account so that you can save your searches. When you find your Bill, if you click on the Bill's Number, you will be taken to the complete page for that bill.

Bill/Law Identification _____ If it became a law, Law Identification Number _____

Title of the Bill or Law _____

Sponsor: _____ Republican / Democrat Date Introduced _____

Committees: _____

Committee Reports: _____

Latest Action: _____

Underline how far this bill has gone below:

Introduced > Passed House > Passed Senate > Resolving Differences > To President > Became Law

Description of the Bill / Law:

- **Summary** (How Many? ___) (You may attach a copy and comment on a separate sheet of paper)
- **Text** (How Many? ___) (You may attach a copy and comment on a separate sheet of paper)
- **Actions** (How Many? ___) Comments:

- **Titles** (How Many? ___) Comments:

- **Amendments** (How Many? ___) Comments:

Cosponsors (How Many? ___) Comments:

• **Committees** (How Many? ___) Comments:

• **Related Bills** (How Many? ___) Comments:

How did YOUR elected officials vote on this piece of legislation? *(find this under Actions and navigate to the Roll Call pages to see the information for your elected official)*

Senator: _____

Comments:

Senator: _____

Comments:

Representative: _____ (You may choose to only track the Representative from YOUR district)

Comments:

Evaluating the Legislation:

Do you think that this legislation will benefit you or your community? Why or why not? Explain, in detail.
