

# LESSON PLAN

## Legislative Branch

**Level:** Low Intermediate, Intermediate

**Suggested Length:** 2 or 3 class periods, depending on class time and level

### Civics Test Questions

- #13—Name one branch or part of the government.
- #16—Who makes federal laws?
- #17—What are the two parts of the U.S. Congress?
- #18—How many U.S. Senators are there?
- #19—We elect a U.S. Senator for how many years?
- #20—Who is one of your state’s U.S. Senators now?
- #21—The House of Representatives has how many voting members?
- #22—We elect a U.S. Representative for how many years?
- #23—Name your U.S. Representative.
- #24—Who does a U.S. Senator represent?
- #25—Why do some states have more Representatives than other states?
- #31—If both the President and the Vice President can no longer serve, who becomes President?
- #47—What is the name of the Speaker of the House of Representatives now?

### Key Vocabulary

legislative branch, Congress  
 bill, federal law, override, approval  
 Senate, Senators, tie, nomination, treaty  
 House of Representatives, Representatives, population, Speaker of the House of Representatives

## Objectives:

Students will:

- identify the legislative branch as one branch of the government
- learn about Congress’ role in the government
- understand the process of bills becoming laws
- identify the two parts of Congress, the number of members in each chamber, and their terms
- understand the eligibility requirements for Senators and Representatives
- understand the special roles of the Senate and House of Representatives
- explain how states and districts are represented in Congress
- name one of their Senators and their Representative, or be able to state that there are none
- identify the name of the current Speaker of the House of Representatives
- explain the role of the Speaker of the House in the presidential order of succession

## Materials:

Wall map of the United States

USCIS Civics Flash Cards or prepared sets of Civics Flash Cards on the legislative branch

Handouts: **The Legislative Branch**, **The U.S. Senate**, **The U.S. House of Representatives**, **True or False—U.S. Congress**,

**Categories—U.S. Congress**, and **Civics Test Questions—Legislative Branch**

**Intermediate Level Legislative Branch Lesson Answer Key**



## Lesson Overview and Notes to Teacher:

There are three intermediate level lessons on the branches of government: executive, legislative, and judicial. We recommend teaching the government lessons in that order, as some content builds on a previous lesson.

In planning this lesson, decide if you want to cover the material in two or three class sessions. Instructions for each handout are described below. The **Key Vocabulary** found on the first page of the lesson plan is generally more advanced than the words in the vocabulary list for the reading and writing portion of the test; however, learning these words will help the students develop a deeper understanding of the concepts in the lesson. The handouts focus on 13 Civics Test items from the System of Government section. On the Civics Test, the applicant may be asked to name their current U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, or the Speaker of the House. Since this information can change frequently, remind your students that they should check this information immediately prior to their naturalization interview. Congress' official

websites are provided on the handouts. In preparation for this lesson, you can find the current names at [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov), [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov), and [www.speaker.gov](http://www.speaker.gov).

Each handout has a reading that addresses questions from the Civics Test. At the end of each reading, the students can review and answer the specific test items from that handout. Some readings may go beyond the scope of the test questions, such as the requirements for being a U.S. Senator or U.S. Representative and the process of a bill becoming a law. This information is provided to give context to the test items. Assure your students that they will not need to know this material for the test. A true-false exercise and a category activity are included for the students to review information about Congress. At the end of the lesson, there is a complete list of the Civics Test items on the legislative branch. Finally, there are instructions for using the USCIS Civics Flash Cards with this lesson.

**The Legislative Branch:** Have the students look at the picture of the U.S. Capitol and ask them **What do you think of when you see this building?** Have them brainstorm words or phrases that come to mind when they see it (**Congress, laws, etc.**). Write their ideas on the board and discuss them. Then write **legislative** on the board. Ask the students if they know what it means (**makes laws, power to change laws**). Ask your students **Who makes laws in your native country?** and discuss their answers together. Then ask **Who makes laws in the United States? (Congress),** and **What are the two parts of Congress? (Senate and House of Representatives).** Explain that members of Congress propose ideas for new laws (bills), discuss the bills, vote on them and then send the passed bills to the president for approval. If the

president signs the bill, it becomes a law. If the president vetoes the bill, Congress can decide to override that veto. If two-thirds of the members of both chambers vote for the bill, it becomes law without the president's signature.

Have the students read the paragraphs silently. Tell them to underline any new words as they read. When they finish, read the paragraphs aloud while they listen. As you read each phrase or sentence, pause to explain any words they do not know. Read each paragraph out loud straight through, or if you wish, have a volunteer read it out loud. Then give the students a chance to hear each sentence and repeat after you. Have the students fill in the answers to the Civics Test items at the bottom of the handout and go over the answers together.

**The U.S. Senate:** Discuss the picture of the Senate. Follow the same procedure for the reading as described above. Review the requirements for becoming a senator and the special duties of the Senate, but explain to the class that they will not need to know this for the Civics Test. Have the students fill in the answers to the test items and go over the answers together. Point out that they may be asked to name one of their senators during the naturalization test, so it is advisable to look up this

information immediately before their naturalization interview. They can find this information on the website listed on the handout.

**Important Note:** With regard to the U.S. Senate, District of Columbia residents and residents of U.S. territories should answer that D.C. (or the territory where the applicant lives) has no U.S. Senators.

**The U.S. House of Representatives:** Display a U.S. map and explain that population (not state size) determines the number of representatives each state has in Congress. Explain that if a state has a large population, the state is divided into districts. Each district has one representative who represents all the residents of that district. If the state's population is small, then there may be one district for the entire state and, therefore, only one U.S. representative. Have the students look at the U.S. map and ask them if they can guess which states have the largest population, (**California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois**), with California being the most populated with approximately 37 million inhabitants and 53 representatives as of 2010. Explain that these states have the most members in the House of Representatives. Ask if they can guess which states have the smallest population, (**Wyoming, Vermont, North Dakota, Alaska, South Dakota**), with Wyoming being the least populated state in the country with approximately 563,000 inhabitants as of 2010. These states each have only one representative. As background, you can explain that every 10 years, the U.S. census estimates the state populations and that information is used to determine the number of districts and representatives for each state. You

can further explain that this system of representation was set up so that all states would have equal voting power in one chamber of Congress (the Senate), and that more populated states would have more voting power in the other chamber (the House of Representatives).

Have the students read the paragraph silently, following the steps described above. One point you should explain is the title and position of **Speaker of the House of Representatives** and the role the Speaker plays in the order of succession if the president and the vice president cannot serve. Have the students fill in the answers to the Civics Test items. Point out to the students that they may be asked to name their representative or the name of the current Speaker of the House during the naturalization test, so they should look up this information immediately before their interview. They can find this information on the websites listed on the handout.

**Important Note:** Regarding the U.S. House of Representatives, residents of territories with nonvoting Delegates or Resident Commissioners may provide the name of that Delegate or Commissioner. Also acceptable is any statement that the territory has no (voting) Representatives in Congress.

**True or False—U.S. Congress:** This true-false exercise reviews the information that students may need for the test. Students will need to decide if the statement is true

or false and circle the correct response. If the sentence is false, they will need to correct it by crossing out some words and writing in the corrections.

**Categories—U.S. Congress:** Point out the word bank at the top of the page. Instruct the students to read the words or phrases and decide if they apply to the Senate,

the House of Representatives, or both chambers. Go over the example with them. Review the answers together.

**Civics Test Questions—Legislative Branch:** The 13 Civics Test items from this lesson are listed on this handout. This can be assigned for homework or pairwork,

where the students can take turns interviewing each other.

**USCIS Civics Flash Cards:** To give the students another activity where they can practice the test questions, use either several sets of the Civics Flash Cards or download the Flash Cards from the Citizenship Resource Center (visit [www.uscis.gov/citizenship](http://www.uscis.gov/citizenship) and search for “Civics Flash Cards—reversed colors cut-out version” for a printer-friendly version). For a student-

centered activity, separate out the specific items on the legislative branch listed at the beginning of the lesson plan. Give one set of those items to each pair or small group of students. Have the students take turns, picking a random card and reading the item aloud for the partner or group to answer. As the students quiz each other, circulate and offer assistance as necessary.