



LAW-RELATED EDUCATION

How Laws Are Created...
The Legislative Process in Illinois

Junior High and High School Activity

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The primary purpose of the Illinois legislature is to pass state laws. Laws being considered in the legislature are known as bills. The Illinois constitution requires that each bill begin with an “enacting clause” that states, “Be it enacted by the people of Illinois represented in the General Assembly.” This enacting clause reminds the legislators that they are working on behalf of the public.

Illinois, like the United States legislature, has two bodies, the Senate and the House of Representatives. This is called a bicameral legislature. A bill becomes a law when it passes both houses of the General Assembly with a majority vote in each house and is signed by the governor. This process can take time with committee debates and caucuses, hearings and amendments being incorporated. A bill that is not signed by the governor within 60 days of being presented to him or her becomes law without signature.

The governor has the power to veto a bill. If the governor vetoes a bill the legislature may override the veto by a three-fifths majority vote in each house. Laws that have passed the legislature and signed by the governor are called public laws or statutes.

A bill may be introduced in either the House or the Senate. The Illinois Constitution, Article IV, section 8, contains several requirements which guarantee that legislators will understand the bills they are acting on before they are passed. A bill, for example, must be printed and available for reading before passage, it must address only one subject, and the section of the law that is being amended must be identified. The bill must be read on three separate days and the final vote must be recorded. Reading a bill does not mean that the entire bill is read. Usually only the title is read but the process of reading announces to the legislature that the bill is being considered, allows legislators to debate the bill and suggest amendments, and prohibits passage of a bill without at least a three-day delay.

The legislative process is one of the most interesting aspects of government. During a legislative session the Capitol in Springfield is the scene of intense political activity as legislators, lobbyists, government officials and citizens attempt to obtain passage or defeat of legislation.

Excerpted from “*Understanding the Illinois Constitution*,” by Frank Kopecky and Mary Sherman Harris. A full text copy of this publication is available on line at <http://www.isba.org/sites/default/files/teachers/publications/Understanding%20the%20Illinois%20Constitution%20-%202010.pdf>

Discussion Points:

- Is it a good idea for the legislature to be able to override the veto of a bill by the Governor? Why is a three-fifths majority required?
- Does the legislative process do an adequate job of building consensus?
- Do you think the citizens, or constituents, of Illinois are really represented by their elected officers?
- Would you like to be a legislator? Why or why not?

Activity – Looking for Laws

Ask students to visit the Illinois General Assembly Website.

<http://www.ilga.gov/>

Ask them to look for public acts

<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/default.asp>

Ask them to search by “key word” for laws that discuss
Minors and drivers licenses or “instruction permit”

Ask them to read at least one piece of legislation that responds to their inquiry, print it and bring it to class.

Were they able to find the General Assembly web page?

Could they navigate it easily?

Did they find numerous pieces of legislation?

Why did they select the one they did?

When was it enacted?

What does it provide?

Do the students agree or disagree with the law?

If they could, would they change the law? If so, how?

For extra credit:

- Ask students to find the name and contact information for their state Senator. Does he or she serve on any committees? Which ones?
- Ask students to find the name and contact information for their state Representative from the House of Representatives. Does he or she serve on any committees? Which ones?

Teachers: You can find this information at the Illinois State Board of Elections:

<http://www.elections.il.gov/>

or by visiting the Secretary of State’s Webpage at

<http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/publications/stgovpub.html>

Legislative Spelling List and Word Search

E U V B R Y Q M A S E V G A O S G R
W Z P J I U T S O L G N I D A E R O
G I G B O C S I B T J Q P O T A O S
N Q T R N E A M R Y I H F P N Y G N
V O U H M O A M K O N O B T E T E O
T M I B D E I U E O N Q N I U I N P
M C L S R R J T I R P I G O T R E S
Q Y A P S J A T U L A M M N I O R A
D E B A T E A W E T H L I N T J A T
Q L Z B T L S A T R I L S E S A L L
G W G T S I Y B B O L T T Z N M P S
T I G I S S E C E R N A S P O G P S
E W G A M E N D M E N T A N C N U L
V E V Z H Q Y K P E Q S Y Q O C B A
L V O Q K V G I S G S B Y A U C L E
H O U S E K Q J E A V I V A A O I P
S T A T U T E S G L M L C H P B C E
K O O E T O V E X Y D L O U J L Q R

ACT	ADOPTION	AMENDMENT
ASSEMBLY	BICAMERAL	BILL
CAUCUS	CONSTITUENT	CONSTITUTION
DEBATE	GENERAL	HOUSE
LEGISLATION	LOBBYIST	MAJORITY
MINORITY	MOTION	PASSAGE
PREAMBLE	PUBLIC	QUORUM
READING	RECESS	REPEAL
SENATE	SESSION	SPONSOR
STATUTES	VETO	VOTE
WITHDRAW	YIELD	



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