

LESSON PLAN

"PLAY HOUSE"



RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL

Middle School



OVERVIEW

This activity is designed to help students understand the process and procedures of the first day of Congress by re-enacting them in the classroom. Students have the opportunity to focus on and retain the key elements of beginning a new Congress, including electing a Speaker, taking the Oath of Office, choosing House Officers, and voting on the House Rules. Students will then participate in legislative business mimicking the U.S. House of Representatives, including being assigned to committees and researching a bill.



CURRICULUM CONNECTION

- U.S. History, American Government, Social Studies
- U.S. House of Representatives, First Day of Congress



OBJECTIVES

1. Students should be able to identify key leadership positions in the U.S. House of Representatives.
2. Students should be able to discuss the duties of these positions during the first day of a new Congress.
3. Students should be able to recognize the basic hierarchy of the U.S. House of Representatives.



LESSON PLAN

1. To help introduce students to the upcoming activity, lead a brief discussion using the questions below:
 - a. What is the U.S. House of Representatives? What does it do?
 - b. How are Representatives elected to the U.S. House of Representatives? What is a congressional district?
 - c. What is the benefit of reorganizing the U.S. House of Representatives every 2 years?
2. Ask students to read the content of the First Day of Congress lesson for Middle School learners on <http://kids.clerk.house.gov> either independently or in groups. Encourage students to take notes and write down any unanswered questions they encounter.
3. Discuss and define the specific roles of each of the following Members and Officers:
 - Clerk of the House
 - Reading Clerk
 - Sergeant at Arms
 - Chaplain of the House
 - Speaker of the House
 - Dean of the House
 - Majority and Minority Party Leaders
 - Majority and Minority Whips

4. After your discussion, assign the following roles to students:
 - a. Clerk of the House
 - b. Reading Clerk
 - c. Delegates (one from District of Columbia, Guam, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and CNMI)
 - d. One Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico
 - e. Two Speaker Nominees
 - f. Dean of the House
 - g. The remainder of the class will act as the Members-elect.
5. Use the web site as a learning guide and follow the following steps to walk the students through the Congress' first day activities.
 - a. The Clerk calls the House to Order.
 - b. The Chaplain offers a prayer (simulate with a moment of silence).
 - c. All participants recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
 - d. The reading clerk calls the Roll (use your class attendance sheet). Students may respond by saying "present."
 - e. The Clerk announces the Resident Commissioner and Delegates.
 - f. Members vote on who they would like to be named Speaker. Write the nominees' names on the blackboard and ask each student, in turn, to speak the name of the person they are voting for. The Clerk can use tick marks on the chalkboard to keep a tally.
 - g. The Dean of the House administers the Oath of Office to the Speaker-elect.
 - h. The Speaker administers the Oath of Office to the Members.
 - i. The Members vote on the new House Officers. Write several names on the blackboard (use fictional names, current Officers, or celebrity names) and ask the students to vote on each in the same manner that they elected the speaker. Use tick marks on the chalkboard to keep a tally.
 - j. The Members adopt the House Rules. They are permitted time to debate any additions to the rules. Encourage students to present any rules beyond their usual classroom rules that they think would be of value and why.
 - k. When the allotted debate time is over, take a vote by asking the students to raise their hand if they agree to adopt the House Rules. Use the blackboard to take a tally.
6. After the mock day of Congress, have a discussion with students to reaffirm everything that happened during the day and the significance of it within the organizational structure of the House.
7. If time permits, continue on with the Extended Activities section.



EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

Working in Committees

1. Assign students to committees. Assign students in to groups of five and give them each a committee name from the list on the Clerk's web site at http://clerk.house.gov/committee_info/index.html.
2. Assign each group a relevant topic (in the form of a bill) based on their committee name. This can be an opportunity for cross-subject learning as well. If you can, try to coordinate your topic choices with the lesson plans of the other teachers in their grade level.
3. Give the students class time and homework time to research the subject and prepare a brief presentation for the other committees.

4. After each committee presents their findings, conduct a mock vote on the Bill with the entire class to determine if the motion should pass.

Building the House

1. Ask students to work either individually or in groups of three to create a diorama of the House Floor. Provide students with a list of everything that must be included:
 - a. Rostrum and the Well
 - b. Electronic Voting System
 - c. Bronze Fasces
 - d. Mace
 - e. Portraits of Washington and Lafayette
 - f. Member Desks



COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the primary duties of the Speaker of the House?
2. What is a quorum and how many Members does it take to achieve one?
3. Which day does the Constitution specify a new Congress should begin? Is it possible for this date to be changed?
4. After the House Rules have been adopted, what are some examples of other types of legislative business that are sometimes conducted on the first day?



CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the Oath of Office? What does it say and what does it mean to the Members who take it?
2. What are the benefits of reorganizing the House every 2 years?



ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

Office of the Clerk
<http://clerk.house.gov>

Online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*
<http://bioguide.congress.gov>

Library of Congress/THOMAS
<http://thomas.loc.gov>