



There Ought to be A LAW!
Melanie Dusci
Albemarle County Public Schools



Topic: bill, law, government

Overview

The purpose of this lesson is to provide students with an understanding of how a bill becomes a law and what role citizens and government play in the process. The lesson will give students an opportunity to “role play” taking an idea through to signing into law.

Grades 4-6

Time Allotment

Three-four 45-minute periods with one being in a computer lab

Learning Objectives

On completion of this lesson students will be able to:

- Identify and illustrate the process of how a bill becomes a law
- Explain the roles of each Branch of Government
- Produce/write a mock bill
- Amend a bill according to suggestions
- Support and defend their bill to the appropriate Government authority
- Assess and interpret bills presented, offering solutions for amending
- This lesson addresses Va. SOLs Social Studies, VS10a; English, 4.1, 4.2, 4.6, 4.8, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.7, 5.8

Media Components

- School House Rock video, “The Best of Schoolhouse Rock”(Can be purchased through, “Really Good Stuff®” @ www.reallygoodstuff.com or 1-800-366-1920. Item number: 135946EJ)
- computer for each student
- software, Apple Works
- TV with VCR for viewing video
- Capitol Classroom legis.state.va.us/CapitolClassroom/CapitolClassroom.htm (This site describes the roles for each branch of government. It also provides a virtual tour of Virginia’s Capitol, used during the culminating or extension activities.)

Materials and Student Handouts

- Book, [The True Story of the Three Little Pigs](#)
- Handouts, “How to Write a Bill”, three column note taking guide (one per student)
- Flip chart or chalkboard
- Computer with TV connection to view Capitol Classroom website
- Scrolls rolled up with “roles” (Senate and General Assembly) – one per student
- Container or basket to hold scrolls



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- Name tags or name plates-one per student

Student Handouts: one per student

- How to Write a Bill
- 3-Column Note taking Guide
- Rubric

Teacher Preparations

- Obtain a copy of The True Story of the Three Little Pigs
- Copy 3 student handouts
- Reserve Computer Lab if necessary, for writing bills – ideally, one computer per student
- Scrolls (small plain paper) labeled with “roles”, Senate or Delegate.
- Scrolls need to be rolled up and tied with small ribbon
- Bookmark website “Capitol Classroom” at [http://legis.state.va.us/Capitol Classroom/Capitol Classroom.htm](http://legis.state.va.us/Capitol_Classroom/Capitol_Classroom.htm)
- School House Rock video, cued to “I’m Just A Bill”
- Chalk or markers
- Vocabulary: amendment, law, bill, point of view, veto, override, delegate, and senator

Introductory Activity

Focus for Media Interaction

After listening to The True Story of the Three Little Pigs and brainstorming ideas about laws, ask students to watch a video that will help them understand how laws are made. From there, they will be choosing an idea about their own community they feel needs to be changed. Students will then turn their ideas into bills by using computers and Apple Works software. A virtual tour of the Capitol in Richmond will conclude these lessons.

Introductory Activity

Have students gather in the “reading area” with a pencil and notebook.

SAY: Today we are going to be reading a story from a character’s point of view you may not be aware of.

ASK: Will someone describe what I mean by “point of view”? Is anyone familiar with the story of the three little pigs? (Have a student summarize the plot of the story.)

SAY: Today we are going to read the same story from the wolf’s point of view. In the next few minutes, write, in your notebook, a prediction of how the plot of the story might change from this point of view. What might some of the differences be? Why? (Allow students sufficient time to write their responses and then some time to share those responses.)

Learning Activities

1. Focus: I am going to read to you The True Story of the Three Little Pigs. I want you to stop me any time you think a law affects that particular event. Start reading the



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story. (Students may not realize the many events that have legal impact. Point out one or two as examples. For instance, on page three, of the story it talks about diet.

Ask: How do we know the food we eat is safe? (Ask about freedom of speech since the Wolf is claiming that “the story” is all wrong.)

Stop: at the end of the book.

Follow-up: Reread your predictions about the plot changes. Was your prediction close? (Have students give examples of what was or was not close.)

2. Focus: Now think about both versions of this story. Have you ever had a situation where you needed to “defend” your behavior or actions? Have you ever had a time when you thought or said **there ought to be a law . . .?** I want you to take a few minutes and write down in your notebook an example of a time when you **thought there ought to be a law**. You do not need to write the entire scenario, state just the issues. Do not use any names of people we may know in your scenario. (Allow students time to write.)

Follow-up: Let’s share some of our examples. (Write some of these on the chart paper or chalkboard.) What did some of the examples have in common? (Guide students to say problems, solutions, who was affected, consequences, etc.) Some situations require making a new law. Can anyone tell me the steps that have to be followed in order to make a new law? (Listen to student answers, but they probably are not familiar with the process.)

3. Focus: Now we are going to watch a video. I want you to watch to see if you notice any similarities our examples had with information in the video. Be sure to notice the roles each play. (video is to be cued to “I’m Just a Bill” – 28:26)

Play: the video.

Pause: the video after the “Idea”part, where it says “he introduced me to Congress and I became a Bill” (29:29).

Follow-up: Who came up with the idea? (citizen)

4. Focus: Now I want you to watch for where the idea goes and what it becomes.

Play: to 30:23, where the bill gets passed and moves to the Senate.



Pause video when it passes through the Senate at 30:29 “and the whole thing starts over again” part.

Follow-up: Where did the “idea” go and what did the idea become? (Senate, a law)What two branches of the legislature are involved in the process of law making? (House of Representatives and Senate)

5. Focus: For this last part I want you to pay attention to all the different things that can happen to a bill once it reaches the final purpose/place.

Play: the video to 31:29.

Follow-up: What are the different actions the Governor/President can take on a Bill? (veto, sign into law, take no action and after a specified time, the bill becomes law without his signature, or amend the bill and return it to the General Assembly).

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6. Focus: We have studied the different branches of government. Each of you will be elected into an office and serve on one of these branches. You will be elected by selecting from this container a tied scroll. Each scroll has a “role”. You will portray that role. Depending on your role, you will create a nametag or nameplate for yourself. Your name must be listed with your position, such as, “Senator . . . You may make up a fictitious name for yourself based on a hobby, sport, or other appropriate theme. For instance, I will be known as “Governor Dusci”. (Pass around the basket with the scrolls; again instruct students to only take one. Also, pass out materials for students to make their nameplates or tags. Allow time to make the nametags.)

7. Focus: We have shared some of our examples of times when we thought **there ought to be a law**. You are going to come up with an original “idea” that is school-based, community-based, or state-based that needs to be turned into a law. These “ideas” may be a “pet peeve” you have, such as students talking too much in the hallway. You will share your “idea” with a classmate. If the classmate agrees that this is a good “idea” (constituent proposal to Delegate or Senator), then you may write it as a bill.

8. Hand out Three-column Note-taking Guide.

Focus: Label the 1st column “House of Delegates,” label the second column “Senate,” and the third “Executive”. (Provide an example on the chalkboard or white board) As I read through this process with you, write on your note-taking guide which group is responsible for which activity and any other important information.

Activity: Direct students to T.V. where you have the Capitol Classroom website on How Bills Become Laws:

<http://legis.state.va.us/CapitolClassroom/4-5/4-5HowBillsBecomeLaws.htm>

Follow-up: What are the different roles each Branch plays in making laws? What are the different actions a Governor may take? (Be sure students have written this information on their Note-taking Guide.)

9. Hand out student sheet on “How to Write A Bill”.

Focus: You are to write a rough draft of a bill, **after** you have agreement from **one** classmate on your “idea.” You must follow the guidelines stated and be sure not to list complaints. State a problem, a solution, who is affected, where the funding will come from (if necessary), and enactment date. We will go to the computer lab to type the final copies in Apple Works Stationary. Once they are typed, you will propose your bill to the appropriate officials. Once they are passed through to the Executive Branch, the governor will take one of the four actions based on content and presentation. (Hand out the rubric and explain the scoring of each category so students are clear as to how to write their bills and how they will be evaluated.)



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Culminating Activities

1. Students create their bills after receiving approval of their ideas from classmates. Students will go to the computer lab to type their bills in Apple Works Stationary, using the scroll background and appropriate font such as "Victorian".
2. Students present/defend their bills in front of the Legislative and Executive Branches, (students in the "roles" they chose earlier), first presenting and seeking passage in the House, then on to the Senate. Representatives may request to amend the Bill. Upon proper approval and agreement, bills may move to the next level. The final approval will come from Governor Dusci. A bill will become a law if it meets all criteria in the rubric.
3. Students will take a Virtual Tour of the Virginia State Capitol, through the Capitol Classroom website, to see the locations and chambers of the General Assembly and view a video tour.

Assessment

A rubric will be used to assess student understanding. Bills must meet the criteria set within the rubric in order to be passed into law. Use the attached rubric for scoring.

Community Connections

- Contact and request a delegate/senator or his representative to come visit the classroom and discuss the processes.
- Write to or have representative from local charity organizations speak regarding how students can help and make a difference.

Cross-Curricular Extensions

Language Arts

- Students can write a letter to their representative (can be found on the Capitol Classroom website). The template for a letter is also found on this website.

Math

- Students can do an experiment using balances explaining the need to keep things in balance and showing how the 3 branches of the government work to do that.

About the Author

Melanie Dusci is a fifth grade teacher at Meriwether Lewis Elementary School in Albemarle County.

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How to Write a Bill



Welcome! You are going to be guided through the process of writing a bill. Leo the lobbyist will help you along the way so you will be insured success in the Virginia General Assembly.



Now that you have finished your "idea" part and received approval from a classmate, you are ready to begin. Keep in mind the following information:

- **Do you have a simple plan of action to propose for your topic?**
- **Is the topic interesting to discuss and debate?**
- **What are the different points of view on this topic?**
- **The solution to your "idea" should be simple and feasible.**

How to Write the Bill

A good bill has several parts:

1. **A short title**
2. **An introduction which briefly states the problem**
3. **A policy that states who should do what**
4. **Funding (if appropriate) - how will your changes be paid for?**
5. **Enactment date**

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After you have written your bill in the format stated, you should edit the bill for both content and style. Have someone read over your bill to be sure you have included all information and that it makes sense. Next you can type your bill using Apple Works Stationary. Be sure to use the "scroll" background.

1	2	3

	Citizen 1	Representative 2	Congress 3	Governor 4	SCORE
Short Title	No Title is present	Title is attempted but incomplete	Title is present but flawed	Title is present, flawless, and clear	
Preamble Briefly States Problem	Preamble not present	Preamble attempted but inadequate	Preamble present but flawed	Preamble present, thorough, and effective	
Policy States Who Does What	Content lacks essential information	Content is incomplete with limited information	Content is satisfactory with limited errors	Content is complete including all essential information	
Funding Options Provided	Funding options not provided	Funding options incomplete or inadequate	Funding options acceptable but vague	Funding options appropriate and effective	
Enactment Date Given	No enactment date provided	Enactment date not appropriate	Enactment date sufficient	Enactment date consistent with policy	