

# Lesson Title: Be the Lawmaker! From Idea to Official Act

## Materials Needed:

- Notebook paper or a word processor
- Pens or pencils
- Index cards or small pieces of paper
- A stapler or paperclip
- Access to the internet for a short video and optional research
- A special "Presidential" pen for signing or vetoing (any pen will do, but a fun one adds to the effect!)
- Optional: A gavel or something to tap on a table (like a wooden spoon)

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- **Analyze** a community or national problem and propose a detailed solution in the form of a legislative bill.
- **Demonstrate** understanding of the key steps in the U.S. legislative process by guiding their bill through a simulation.
- **Evaluate** the importance of debate, compromise, and procedure in creating laws.

## Lesson Activities & Procedure

### Part 1: The Spark of an Idea (15-20 minutes)

1. **The Hook:** Start by asking the student: *"If you had the power to create one new law to make our community, state, or country a better place, what would it be?"* Discuss their initial ideas. What problem are they trying to solve? Who would their law help?
2. **Watch & Learn:** Watch the classic Schoolhouse Rock video, "I'm Just a Bill" (available on YouTube). This is a fun, memorable overview of the process we are about to simulate. After watching, briefly discuss the main steps shown in the video: an idea, writing a bill, committee, House/Senate votes, and the President's signature.
3. **Choose an Issue:** Have the student select one specific, school-appropriate issue they feel passionate about. It could be anything from "a mandatory 30 minutes of recess for all high school students" to "a national ban on single-use plastic straws" or "tax credits for families who adopt shelter pets." The more specific, the better!

### Part 2: Drafting Your Bill (25-30 minutes)

Now, the student becomes a member of the House of Representatives and must write down their idea in a formal way. Provide them with paper or a word processor.

1. **Title the Bill:** Every bill has a number. Let's call this one **H.R. 1** (for House of Representatives). They should give it a formal, descriptive title. For example: *"The Student Wellness and Recess Act of 2024."*
2. **Write the Preamble:** This is a short section explaining *why* the law is needed. It usually starts with "Be it enacted..." Your student can write something like: *"To improve the physical and mental health of students, this act is proposed to ensure adequate free time during the school day."*
3. **Create the Sections (The "What"):** This is the most important part. The student should

break their law down into a few clear, numbered sections.

- **Section 1: Definitions.** Define any key terms. (e.g., "School day," "Recess").
- **Section 2: The Mandate.** What does the law actually do? (e.g., "All public high schools receiving federal funding must provide a minimum of 30 consecutive minutes of unstructured recess per school day.").
- **Section 3: Enforcement.** How will we know the law is being followed? What happens if it's not? (e.g., "The Department of Education will conduct audits. Schools not in compliance will receive a formal warning.").

4. **Introduce the Bill:** Once written, have the student formally "introduce" their bill by reading it aloud. After reading, they can place it in a designated spot, which we will call the "hopper."

### Part 3: The Simulation Gauntlet (30-40 minutes)

This is where you, the teacher, play multiple roles to guide the bill through the process. Use the index cards to create signs for the different roles you'll play.

#### 1. Role-Play: Committee Chair.

- **Action:** Take the bill from the "hopper." Announce, "H.R. 1 has been assigned to the Committee on Education." As Committee Chair, your job is to review and maybe change the bill (this is called "markup").
- **Interaction:** Ask the student tough questions. *"Is 30 minutes too long? What if a school can't afford to supervise it? Your bill doesn't mention funding. We need to add an amendment."*
- **Compromise:** Work with the student to "amend" (change) the bill. Maybe they agree to change it to 25 minutes to get your support. Write the changes directly on the bill. Then, as the committee, hold a vote. (Tap your gavel/spoon). "The Committee on Education votes 'Yea' to send H.R. 1 to the full House floor!"

#### 2. Role-Play: The House Floor Debate.

- **Action:** Now, you represent a different perspective. You can be a Representative who opposes the bill.
- **Interaction:** State your argument. *"I vote 'Nay'! This bill takes away valuable instruction time from core subjects like math and science! It's an overreach of federal power."* Allow the student (the bill's sponsor) to give a 2-minute speech defending their bill and responding to your concerns. This teaches them to think on their feet and justify their ideas.
- **The Vote:** Hold a final vote for the "House of Representatives." Let's assume it passes!

#### 3. Role-Play: The Senate (Fast Track).

- **Action:** To keep things moving, announce that the Senate has passed a nearly identical bill and that it's ready for the final step. (In reality, this is a whole other complex process!).

#### 4. Role-Play: The President of the United States.

- **Action:** The bill has now passed both houses of Congress and lands on your desk. You have the ultimate power.
- **Interaction:** Review the final version of the bill out loud. Pause dramatically. Then, you have two choices:
  1. **Sign it into Law:** Take out your special "Presidential" pen and sign the bill with a flourish. Announce, "I am signing H.R. 1 into law. It is now Public Law 118-XX." Congratulate the student on their hard work!
  2. **VETO it:** Refuse to sign it. Take out a different colored pen, write "VETO" across the front, and explain your reasoning. *"While I support student wellness, this bill creates an unfunded mandate for schools. Therefore, I must veto it."* This is a powerful lesson in checks and balances and shows that even a great idea can fail.

## Closure and Assessment (10 minutes)

Whether the bill passed or was vetoed, have a debriefing conversation. This is where the real learning is cemented.

- **Reflection Questions:**

- What was the most challenging part of getting your bill through the process?
- Why was the committee stage so important? How did your bill change?
- How did it feel to have to defend your idea during the "debate"?
- What does this simulation teach us about why it's often so difficult and slow to pass laws in the real world?

- **Assessment:** The student's completed bill serves as a written product for assessment. Your evaluation of their learning will come from their participation in the simulation and the thoughtfulness of their answers to the reflection questions. You are looking for an understanding that lawmaking is a process of compromise, debate, and procedure—not just having a good idea.

## Extension & Differentiation

- **For a Challenge:** Have the student research a real bill currently in Congress using a site like Congress.gov. Ask them to identify what committee it's in and what its chances of passing are. They could even write a letter to their actual representative about it.
- **For Support:** Provide the student with a pre-made bill template with the sections already laid out. During the simulation, take on a more supportive role as "Speaker of the House," helping them navigate the process rather than opposing them.