

Making Laws is a Big Job, But...

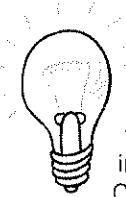
Yes, that's right: Somebody has to do it. In the United States, that somebody is Congress.

Congress Who?

If you read the Constitution of the United States, you'll see that "all legislative powers" were given to "a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives." Sound complicated? It's not. All the Constitution does is create one group of lawmakers (**Congress**) that is divided into two smaller groups (the **Senate** and the **House of Representatives**). Can you imagine what would happen if everyone in the country had to spend their time making laws? That's why the citizens of each state elect a certain number of Senators and Representatives to represent them in the lawmaking process.

I've Got It!

So how does Congress decide what laws to pass? Most often, the President or a member of Congress get an idea for a new law. Usually the ideas start with some kind of problem that Congress hopes a law can solve. For example, Congress might want to do a better job of controlling the flow of immigrants across the country's borders, while also providing a good way for immigrants to apply for citizenship. Or maybe Congress wants to help create jobs by passing tax cuts for employers and spending money on construction projects. No matter who thinks up an idea for a new law, the idea must be written down and either a Senator or Representative must introduce the idea to Congress.



The Fun Part

When an idea for a law is written down, it is called a **bill**. A bill is like a rough draft of a law. Just like the rough draft of a paper you write for school, a bill gets marked up and re-written over and over. The bill starts in a committee that studies the bill and decides whether the idea is even worth becoming a law in the first place. Some bills "die" in the committee and never get any farther. If a bill survives (whew!), it's still not out of danger. The members of Congress will debate and even argue about other changes they think should be made. A bill's life is no picnic!

To-Do List

1. Write down idea for a law
2. Get Senate to pass it
3. Get House of Representatives to pass it
4. Get President to sign it
5. Celebrate!

"Legislative"
means
"able to pass laws"

CONGRESS: THE BASICS

Senate	House of Representatives
Members are called <u>Senators</u>	Members are called <u>Representatives</u>
Each state gets to elect 2 Senators	Each state gets to elect a different number of Representatives depending on the state's population
Right now there are 100 Senators	Right now there are 435 Representatives

Let's Make it Official

A bill can't become a law unless the members of Congress vote in favor of it. If a bill is introduced in the Senate, the Senators will vote first. If they approve the bill, it goes to the House of Representatives (or vice versa if the House votes first). But if you think the trouble is over, think again: If the other group wants to make changes, then the fun part starts over. There will be more mark-ups, more debates, and more re-writes. A bill can't become law until both the Senate and the House agree on a bill that says exactly the same thing. But wait! That's not all. Even if Congress votes in favor of the bill, it still can't become law until the President approves it. The President can either sign the bill to approve it or **veto** the bill to reject it.

Veto This!

You mean after all that, the President can just reject the bill? Yep! But that doesn't mean the end of the line for the bill. Congress can **override** the President's veto by voting again. If two-thirds of the members of Congress vote for the bill, then it will become law even if the President doesn't like it. It's really hard to get that many people to agree, so after a veto members of Congress usually discuss the bill again and try to work out a compromise that the President will approve. That means going back to... You guessed it! The fun part.

All Done

Once the bill is passed and signed by the President, it becomes a **statute**. The new statute gets a special number and joins all the other statutes as part of our **code**, or set of laws. The code is organized by topic, so the new statute will be grouped with other laws on the same subject.

Did Somebody Say "Statute?"

Don't miss that extra "t" in the word "statute." We're not talking about a big sculpture! A statute just means a written law.



Name _____

Date _____

A. Finish each sentence.

Congress was created by the:

A bill is:

The President will veto a bill if:

A statute is:

If the Senate passes a bill but the House doesn't like it the way it is, then:

Congress can successfully override a veto if:

Usually Congress cannot override a veto because:

"Legislative" means:

The reason for thinking up ideas for new laws is:

A bill might die in a: _____

B. Numbers, numbers!

	Your Answer
Number of parts Congress is divided into	
Number of Senators each state gets	
Total number of Senators	
Number of Representatives each state gets <i>(careful!)</i>	
Total number of Representatives	
Fraction of Congress needed to override a veto	
<i>Challenge:</i> Number of Senators needed to override a veto (It's math, but you can do it!)	
<i>Challenge:</i> Number of Representatives needed to override a veto	
<i>Giveaway:</i> Number of Presidents needed to sign a bill	
<i>Trick Question:</i> Number of times a bill might get re-written	

C. Where should the statute go? In the United States Code, statutes are organized by "title." Each subject gets its own title. Next to each law, write the number of the title where it would be found in the code.

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Title 10. Armed Forces | Title 38. Veterans Benefits |
| Title 20. Education | Title 43. Public Lands |
| Title 21. Food and drugs | Title 45. Railroads |
| Title 23. Highways | Title 47. Telephones |
| Title 29. Labor | Title 49. Transportation |

_____ A law allowing telecommunications companies to use satellite technology

_____ A law controlling air traffic at airports

_____ A law requiring eggs to be refrigerated

_____ A law giving medical care to soldiers returning from war

_____ A law creating a "safe schools" program

_____ A law creating the Air Force

_____ A law setting a national minimum wage