

Lesson plan for

CONGRESS

Introduction

This lesson is about the roles and powers of the legislative branch of the United States government. You will lead the class through the eleven questions from the naturalization test related to Congress. Then, students will be asked to do their own research to further explore their representatives in Congress.

Learning about the individual representatives can make it easier to remember their names for the naturalization test, and puts a personal face on the U.S. government. It can also reinforce questions about Congress in general.

Objectives

The student will be better able to

- Recall the answers to the eleven USCIS test questions in the Congress theme.
- Name one or more of their current Congressional representatives.

USCIS Questions

In the Congress theme:

16. Who makes federal laws?
17. What are the two parts of the U.S. Congress?
18. How many U.S. Senators are there?
19. We elect a U.S. Senator for how many years?
20. Who is one of your state's U.S. Senators now?
24. Who does a U.S. Senator represent?
21. The House of Representatives has how many voting members?
22. We elect a U.S. Representative for how many years?
23. Name your U.S. Representative.
25. Why do some states have more Representatives than other states?
47. What is the name of the Speaker of the House of Representatives now?

Related:

41. Under our Constitution, some powers belong to the federal government. What is one power of the federal government?
55. What are two ways that Americans can participate in their democracy?

Time

Theme: 15 minutes

Activity: 1 hour

Extra Activity: 1 hour

Materials

- Internet connectivity
- EITHER classroom projector OR enough computers for students to use as individuals or small groups
- *Preparing for the Oath* website, Congress theme (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/citizenship/index.html?theme=4>)
- Get to know your Representative/Senator handouts ([attached](#))
- Printer
- (optional) scissors
- (optional) tape or glue

For additional activity:

- Stamps, envelopes, and letter template ([attached](#)) OR alternative template in Word format (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/citizenship/pdf/Congresstemplate.doc>)

Challenge Words

You can find all of the bold words in the vignettes in the word list (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/citizenship/pdf/Wordlist.pdf>). Listed below are some of those words that will come up often during the lesson.

Act: a law that is officially accepted by the government, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act

Bill/bills: a plan for a law that the government reviews

Census: a formal count of the population in a city, county, state, or country

Debate/debates: to discuss something with opposing sides

District: an area of a city or country that is officially divided from other areas

Mental disabilities: conditions of the mind that make it hard for someone to do things most people are able to do

Physical disabilities: conditions of the body that make it hard for someone to do things most people are able to do

Represent/represents/represented/representation: to make decisions for another person or group of people; represented is the past tense form of represent.

Run for office: to seek political office, such as in Congress

Terms: the time someone is in a political office

Teacher Tech Tips

To learn how to use *Preparing for the Oath*, visit the help page at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/citizenship/help.html>

Depending on your students' proficiency level, you might want to offer a transcript of the narration for students to read along while watching and listening, or to have as a reference. You can find printable transcripts at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/citizenship/pdf/Transcript.pdf>.

You may notice that the web address never changes as you navigate through *Preparing for the Oath*. In order to go directly to a specific theme or question on the site, you can find a list of links at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/citizenship/pdf/Links.pdf>. These links may be useful for using your browser's "bookmark" tool or assigning student work. The link to go directly to the Congress theme is <http://americanhistory.si.edu/citizenship/index.html?theme=4>.

Some learning environments will be conducive to the sound features, while others will not. It is always possible to turn on and off the website's audio feature by clicking on this symbol: ♪) However, please keep in mind that the test itself is spoken aloud. Students will need to be comfortable responding to spoken questions, and be able to respond orally.

Don't feel tied down by the structure of the themes. Once you are inside a theme, the image tiles along the bottom represent the individual questions within that theme. You may click on the tiles out of order to view the questions as you choose. Similarly, you may jump around the three modes within each question: Learn, Practice, and Try.

Procedure

1. Lead the class through the Congress theme, as presented on the Preparing for the Oath website (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/citizenship/index.html?theme=4>).
2. Briefly review the answers to USCIS Questions 16, 17, and 25, on the legislative branch and the roles of congressmen and senators.
3. Allow students to ask any questions they have. Feel free to refer to the Background Information sheet ([attached](#)), as needed.
4. Hand out "Get to Know Your Senator" and "Get to Know Your Representative" sheets ([attached](#)).
5. Either as a class or individually, have students fill in questions 1-4 of the "Get to Know Your Senator" and "Get to Know Your Representative" sheets. If students struggle with the answers, review the questions on the *Preparing for the Oath* website.
6. Have students research online to find the rest of the information they need to fill out the handouts.

Research tips: house.gov is a great starting point for research for the House of Representatives. Type in your zip code in the field on the top right. You will

be directed to the correct representative's website. Similarly, senate.gov is a good place to find information on your state's senators. Select your state on the top right. That will lead you to the correct senators' websites.

Option 1: Research as a class to find the answers about your congressperson and senators. Some students may live in different states and districts. Be sure to have your students learn the correct answers for their locations.

Option 2: Have each student research this information individually or in small groups. This option may be more appropriate if your students are proficient in English, are more familiar with using computers, and if you have enough computers for each person/small group in the class. You may want to assign each individual or group one Congressperson, then have them report back to the class.

7. (Optional extension activity) Help your students discuss issues and take action by writing letters to their representatives.
 - a. Complete this activity in a separate class session.
 - b. Discuss with students some issues they would like to contact their local Congressperson about.
 - c. Using the letter template ([attached](#)), have each student write his or her letter.
 - d. Share their letters with a partner or with the class
 - e. Have the class give feedback on the letter.
 - f. Print, stamp, address, and send the letters.

Learn More Links

Smithsonian's History Explorer

(<http://historyexplorer.americanhistory.si.edu>)

Your gateway to innovative online resources for teaching and learning American history, designed and developed by the National Museum of American History.

The American Presidency Online Exhibition

(<http://americanhistory.si.edu/presidency>)

The online exhibition accompanies *The American Presidency* exhibition at the National Museum of American History. Although the exhibition focuses on the presidents, it also interprets artifacts from Congress and discusses the legislative branch's relationship with the president.

The United States House of Representatives

(<http://www.house.gov>)

The official website of the House of Representatives has a wealth of information about sessions of the House and other House activity. It is also an easy way to find information about your district's representative.

The United States Senate

(<http://www.senate.gov>)

The official website of the Senate has a wealth of information about sessions of the Senate and other Senate activity. It is also an easy way to find information about your state's U.S. senators.

Background Information

- Established by Article I of the Constitution, the Legislative Branch consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Together, they form the United States Congress.
- The Constitution grants Congress the sole authority to enact legislation and declare war, the right to confirm or reject many Presidential appointments, and gives Congress substantial investigative powers.
- In order to pass legislation and send it to the President for his signature, both the House and the Senate must pass the same bill by majority vote.
- If the President vetoes a bill, they may override his veto by passing the bill again in each chamber with at least two-thirds of each body voting in favor.

House of Representatives

- The House of Representatives is made up of 435 elected voting members, divided among the 50 states in proportion to their total population. In addition, there are six non-voting members, representing the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and four other territories of the United States.
- The presiding officer of the House of Representatives is the Speaker of the House, elected by the Representatives. He or she is third in line of succession to the Presidency.
- Members of the House are elected every two years and must be 25 years of age, a U.S. citizen for at least seven years, and a resident of the state (but not necessarily the district) they represent.

Senate

- The Senate is composed of 100 Senators, two for each state.
- Until the ratification of the 17th Amendment in 1913, Senators were chosen by state legislatures, not by popular vote. Since then, they have been elected to six-year terms by the people of the state.
- Senator's terms are staggered so that about one-third of the Senate is up for reelection every two years.
- Senators must be 30 years of age, U.S. citizens for at least nine years, and residents of the state they represent.
- The Vice President of the United States serves as President of the Senate and may cast the decisive vote in the event of a tie in the Senate.

Get to Know Your Senator

(Questions with a + sign are USCIS test questions.)

Place a picture of your senator here.

Answer these questions from the information you learned in *Preparing for the Oath*.

1. How many U.S. Senators are there?+

2. We elect a U.S. Senator for how many years?+

3. Who does a U.S. Senator represent?+

4. What state do you live in?

Answer the following questions with research. Use the website senate.gov. Select your state from the field on the top right to find your state's senators.

5. Name both of your state's U.S. Senators now.+

Note: You will only need to know one name for the civics test.

Circle the senator you will choose to focus on.

6. When was he/she first elected to office? _____

7. How many years has he/she been in office? _____

8. What is his/her political party? _____

9. When is the next time he/she must run for election? _____

10. What are some important issues to your U.S. senator? _____

11. How can you contact him/her?

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone Number _____

Get to Know Your Representative

(Questions with a + sign are USCIS test questions.)

Place a picture of your representative here.

Answer these questions from the information you learned in *Preparing for the Oath*.

1. The House of Representatives has how many voting members?⁺

2. We elect a U.S. Representative for how many years?⁺

3. Why do some states have more Representatives than other states?⁺

4. What state do you live in?

Answer the following questions with research. Use the website house.gov. Select your state on the field on the top right to find your state's representatives in Congress.

5. How many districts are in your state? _____
6. How many representatives are from your state? _____
7. What district do you live in? _____
8. Name your U.S. representative.⁺ _____
9. When was he/she first elected to office? _____
10. How many years has he/she been in office? _____
11. What is his/her political party? _____
12. When is the next time he/she must run for election? _____
13. What are some important issues to your U.S. representative? _____

14. How can you contact him/her?
Address: _____
Email: _____
Phone Number: _____

PREPARING FOR THE OATH
U.S. HISTORY AND CIVICS FOR CITIZENSHIP

_____, 20____
Date

The Honorable _____
Name of Senator or Congressman/woman

Address

Address

City, State, and Zip Code

Your Name

Your Address

Your City, State, and Zip Code

Your Email

Your Phone Number

Dear Honorable _____,
Senator or Representative's last name

I am writing to ask you to/ support/ oppose (circle one)

This is important because

Thank you for all you do as our representative in Washington, D.C.

Sincerely,

Your Signature