

Lesson Activity: Chutes & Lawmaking Game

Time: 1 hour

Grades: 4-12

Objective: Understand the various paths and roadblocks for a bill to become a law in the Washington State Legislature

Materials: Chutes & Lawmaking Board Game (download and print on 2 sheets of legal or tabloid size paper and tape together at center fold)
Chutes & Lawmaking Directions (download and print for each student team)
Playing tokens (use anything available, one per player)
6-sided die or spinner

Lesson Plan

1. Introduce legislative process concepts and vocabulary. Watch Teach With TVW's video on How a Bill Becomes a Law in WA (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RuJdppny-s>, 4:37 runtime) or use the How Bills Become Law presentation in our Lesson Plan library (<http://leg.wa.gov/CivicEd/Pages/LessonPlans.aspx#hbb1>) to provide an overview of the system. The Chutes & Lawmaking handout explains each step of the process as students play the game, but make sure to cover the following vocabulary before beginning:
 - Bill – a proposal for a new law
 - Legislator – a person elected to vote on laws on behalf of their community
 - Legislature, House, and Senate – the group of elected lawmakers who meet to write, study, and vote on Washington State laws. There are two “chambers,” the House and Senate, which must BOTH pass all new laws.
 - Governor – the person elected by all of Washington State to lead the executive branch, who approves or vetoes all laws passed by the Legislature.
2. Before starting the game, have each student write down the title or topic of the “bill” they are trying to pass (for example, “An Act to require pizza be served in all school cafeterias,” or “An Act allowing 16-year-olds to vote.” Have students brainstorm or journal for 5 minutes about the people or groups who would support their bill (want it to pass) and those who would not want it to pass (and the concerns or reasons they might give).
3. Divide students into groups of 2-4 and provide each group with a copy of the Chutes & Lawmaking Board Game and Directions handout, tokens, and a die or spinner. As they play through the game, encourage students to put the chutes and ladders in the context of the bill topic they wrote down. If their bill lands on “negative testimony in committee,” what kinds of objections would people have been raising? If it got sent to a fiscal committee, what would it cost to implement their idea? If it gets a boost from bipartisan support, what kind of compromises or relationships probably helped it?



4. Play can continue until:
 - one player has reached the 110th square and successfully turned their bill into a law
 - all players have reached the 110th square
 - a fixed time limit (15-20 minutes) is reached. There are a lot more “chutes” than “ladders” in the legislative process, so warn students that you may have to stop before anyone has made it to the end.
5. Have students journal or discuss what happened in the game. Prompt questions can include:
 - Was it harder or easier than you anticipated to make it to the end of the game?
 - What was frustrating about the process?
 - Less than 1 in 7 bills introduced in the Legislature actually become law in any given session, but many bills are introduced year after year until they finally pass. Why do you think the process is designed that way? Would it be better if bills could pass more quickly?
 - What amendments, changes, or compromises might have helped your bill pass, if this was real life?

Adaptations and Extension Activities

Invite a legislator. This activity is a great one to do when you have a legislator visit your classroom. Ask the legislator to introduce the process and talk about some of the ways they work with colleagues to help pass their bills, or decide which bills should move on. The legislator can play the game with students or float between groups, and then offer their input in the discussion afterwards.

Design your own games! Designing their own card game, board game, or choose-your-own adventure game (virtual or otherwise) is a great assessment activity for students studying the legislative process. Use a rubric to make sure students include the important stages of the process and the role of citizen input, compromise, and negotiation in determining which bills go forward.

For More Information

Teach With TVW: How a Bill Becomes a Law in WA

<http://www.teachwithtvw.org/how-a-bill-becomes-a-law-in-wa/>

How Bills Become Law Lesson Plan

<http://leg.wa.gov/CivicEd/Pages/LessonPlans.aspx#hbb1>

Reading a Bill History (use the Legislature’s website and this guide to see who sponsored a bill, what committee it was assigned to, and where it is in the process)

http://leg.wa.gov/LIC/Documents/EducationAndInformation/Bill_HistoryPage_Tutorial.pdf

