

Voting in Congress

Time Needed: One or two class periods

Materials Needed:

Student worksheets

PowerPoint w/projector (optional)

Copy Instructions:

Notetaking Booklet (*4 pages; copy double-sided to make booklet; class set*)

Voting Guide (*2 pages; class set*)

Learning Objectives. Students will be able to:

- Identify the constitutional powers of Congress.
- Describe the factors members of Congress weigh when voting on bills.
- Demonstrate how members of Congress weigh factors by voting on hypothetical bills.
- Evaluate information in order to apply each factor to real-life issues in the hypothetical bills.
- Weigh the importance of the factors by deciding whether to vote “yea” or “nay” on each bill.

STEP BY STEP

OPTION A: PAPER-ONLY LESSON (One-Period Lesson)

- DISTRIBUTE** one Voting in Congress Notetaking Booklet to each student.
- SHOW** students how to fold the handout in half so it makes a booklet. The title of the booklet should be on the front.
- USE** the Teacher Key for the booklet to guide students through filling in the blanks. Discuss concepts with the class as you go along.
- PAUSE** during the lesson to quiz the class using the mini quizzes. (see Active Participation Guide)
- DISTRIBUTE** one Voting in Congress Voting Guide to each student. Distribute the **first page only**. (For a longer lesson, distribute both pages and print the PowerPoint slides for bills B and C to use as a teacher guide.)
- TELL** students to fill in their identities on the top half of the first page.
- GUIDE** students through the voting activity for Bill A by following the instructions and discussion points on the Class Activity Guide. Students should refer to their notetaking booklets during the activity.

OPTION B: POWER POINT LESSON (One- or Two-Period Lesson)

- DISTRIBUTE** one Voting in Congress Notetaking Booklet to each student.
- SHOW** students how to fold the handout in half so it makes a booklet. The title of the booklet should be on the front.
- GUIDE** students through Part 1 of the Voting in Congress PowerPoint presentation. Pause to allow students to fill in the blanks in their notetaking booklets as you go along. (The lesson includes mini-quizzes throughout, as well as a closing mini quiz.)
- DISTRIBUTE** one Voting in Congress Voting Guide to each student to each student.
- TELL** students to fill in their identities on the top half of the first page.
- GUIDE** students through Part 2 of the PowerPoint presentation. Pause for discussion of each question and issue. *Students should refer to their booklets during the activity.* The presentation will tell students when it's time to write information on their Voting Guides and when it's time to vote. (If you don't get through all the bills, that's OK. For a one-period lesson, just do Bill A.)

Mini Quizzes—Paper-Only Lesson

(These activities are in the PowerPoint.)

DIRECTIONS: Tell the class you will ask a series of questions and that they are to answer as a chorus. Tell them to wait to answer until you ask for the answer. Ask each question twice, give wait time, then ask for the answer. Ask the class to explain why “false” or wrong answer choices are incorrect.

Mini Quiz #1

(Give quiz after you’ve done Factor #1)

1. Congress can pass any law it wants to. (F)
2. Congress has the power to create armies. (T)
3. Congress cannot control business that happens in more than one state. (F)
4. Congress may collect taxes for certain reasons. (T)
5. Congress cannot make any laws about immigration. (F)
6. Congress can make any law as long as it is “necessary and proper.” (F)
7. When can Congress do something that is not listed in the Constitution?
 - A. Always
 - B. Never
 - C. *When it relates to something that is listed.*
 - D. Only on Thursdays

Mini Quiz #2

(Give quiz after you’ve done Factor #4)

1. Members of Congress vote based only on their personal opinions. (F)
2. Members of Congress always agree with their political party about bills. (F)
3. When considering a bill, members of Congress should think about:
 - A. Only themselves
 - B. *Voters back home*
 - C. People on the moon
4. If people in Congress do a bad job, voters back home can kick them out. (T)
5. In Congress, being on a political party is like being on a _____. (team)
6. People in political parties share similar:
 - A. Eye Color
 - B. Opinions about movies
 - C. *Values*
7. When voting on a bill, members of Congress usually think about four things. What are those four things?

(The Powers of Congress, Personal Opinion, Political Party Views, and What the Voters Think)

Voting Activity: Paper-Only Lesson (A Bill to Stop Mail on Saturdays)

DIRECTIONS: Make sure each student has a copy of the Voting Guide. First, let students choose their identities by filling out the top half of the handout. Then help the class put the “four factors” they just learned about into practice by guiding them through a vote to decide whether Saturday mail delivery should stop. Use the guide below to help students consider each factor properly.

Factor #1: Does Congress have the power to stop Saturday mail delivery?

- Does Congress have power over post offices (therefore the postal service)?
- Have students check the list in their booklets under Factor #1
- Have students fill in the information for Factor #1 on the voting handout.

Factor #2: In your opinion, should Saturday mail delivery end?

- WAIT! Some things to consider (discuss each one with the class):
 - The Postal Service pays for itself with the money it brings in from its services.
 - The Postal Service has been losing a LOT of money because people are sending fewer letters
 - Why might people be sending fewer letters (email; paying bills online)
 - In 2009, the Postal Service lost \$3.8 billion. Stopping Saturday mail would save \$3 billion.
 - However, a lot of people want to get mail 6 days per week!
- Have students fill in the information for Factor #2 on the voting handout

Factor #3: Would your political party support stopping mail delivery on Saturdays?

- Tell students to look at the checklist of values on the front of their voting handout. Which value most matches the purpose of this bill? Which political party most likely supports that value? (cost saving—Republican)
- Have students fill in the information for Factor #3 on the voting handout

Factor #4: Would your voters support stopping Saturday mail delivery?

- WAIT! More things to consider (discuss each with the class):
- In 1957, Congress passed a bill to end Saturday mail delivery. It lasted one Saturday. Voters were so angry that Congress passed another bill to bring Saturday mail delivery back!
 - Did they have email and online bill pay in 1957? Might that make a difference?
- For this activity, have students pretend the majority of voters they represent are older voters. Older voters are more likely to use the Postal Service, while younger voters are more likely to do business online. If the majority of their voters are older, will the voters likely support this bill?
- Have students fill in the information for Factor #3 on the voting handout.

Time to Vote!

- Tell students to weigh the four factors and mark their vote for or against the bill on their voting handout
- Tally the votes
- Discuss results with the class

Factor #4

What the _____ Think

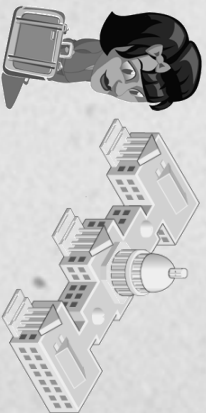
There would be too many people in Congress if _____ went . . .



So voters choose a _____ people to represent them.

Members of Congress are responsible for _____ the voters back _____.

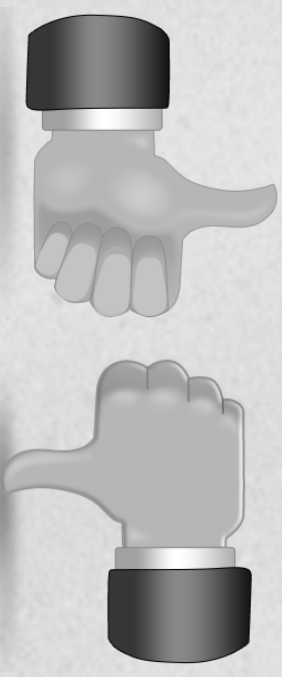
So they'd better think about those voters, because voters _____ people to Congress . . .



. . . and voters can _____ people _____!



VOTING IN CONGRESS



Members of Congress think about
FOUR FACTORS
when deciding whether to vote for
a law...

Name: _____

Factor #1

The _____ of _____

Congress is _____ by what the _____ says.

Here is what Congress can do:

- Collect _____ to raise money to pay _____ to _____ the country, and to provide for the _____ of the U.S.
- Pass laws about _____ that happens in more than one _____, with _____ countries, and with Indian _____.
- Make laws about _____.
- Make laws about _____.
- Establish _____.
- Declare _____.
- Raise and support _____.



Congress can also make all _____ that are _____ and _____ for executing the powers on the list above.

That means Congress can sometimes can do things that are _____ on the list if they are related to something that _____ on the list.

Factor #2

Personal _____

Members of Congress are _____, just like you!

Sometimes members of Congress _____ with a bill . . .

. . . and sometimes they are totally _____ a bill.



Love it!

No way!



Factor #3

Views _____

People in a political party share similar _____.

They work for _____ that _____ those values.



For a member of Congress, being on a political party is like being on a _____. Members of the team _____ each other and try to create _____ that reflect their values.

Usually members of Congress _____ with their political party about bills . . . but sometimes they _____!

Factor #4

What the **Voters** Think

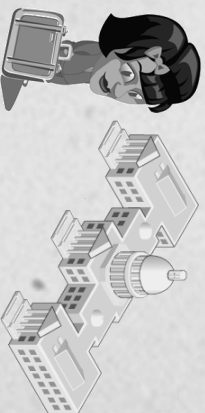
There would be too many people in Congress if everyone went . . .



So voters choose a few people to represent them.

Members of Congress are responsible for representing the voters back home.

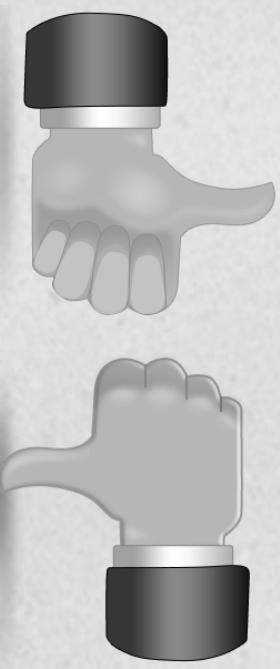
So they'd better think about those voters, because voters send people to Congress . . .



. . . and voters can kick people out!



VOTING IN CONGRESS



Members of Congress think about

FOUR FACTORS

when deciding whether to vote for a law...

Factor #1

The Powers of Congress

Congress is limited by what the Constitution says.

Here is what Congress can do:

- Collect taxes to raise money to pay debts, to defend the country, and to provide for the general welfare of the U.S.
- Pass laws about business that happens in more than one state, with foreign countries, and with Indian tribes.
- Make laws about immigration.
- Make laws about bankruptcy.
- Establish post offices.
- Declare war.
- Raise and support armies.



Congress can also make all laws that are necessary and proper for executing the powers on the list above.

That means Congress can sometimes can do things that are not on the list if they are related to something that is on the list.

Factor #2

Personal Opinion

Members of Congress are human beings, just like you!

Sometimes members of Congress agree with a bill . . .

. . . and sometimes they are totally against a bill.



Love it!

No way!



Factor #3

Political Party Views

People in a political party share similar values.

They work for laws that reflect those values.




For a member of Congress, being on a political party is like being on a team. Members of the team support each other and try to create bills that reflect their values.

Usually members of Congress agree with their political party about bills . . . but sometimes they don't!

Voting in Congress

Name: _____



A. Choose Your Role! Are you a Senator or a Representative? Choose one and put your information on your new business card:



SENATOR _____
(Your Name)

Representing the State of _____
(Your State)

Office of Senator _____
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510





REPRESENTATIVE _____
(Your Name)




Representing the City of _____

State of _____




Office of Rep. _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515



B. Choose Your Value! Mark the ONE value you care about the most:

-  **Liberty:** means that people have the freedom to do things that they want to do
-  **Competition:** means that people are encouraged to compete to succeed
-  **Cost Saving:** means that the government is not spending a lot of money

(These tend to be **Republican Party** values.)

-  **Equality:** means that everyone is treated fairly and has an equal chance
-  **Cooperation:** means people are encouraged to work together to get things done
-  **Generosity:** means the government provides large benefits or services to citizens

(These tend to be **Democratic Party** values.)

Bill "A": No Mail on Saturdays

Factor #1

Does Congress have the power to do this?

Yes No

Because _____

Factor #2

In your opinion, should this bill pass?

Yes No

Because _____

Factor #3

Which political party would likely support this bill?

1) Check the one value this bill stands for the most:

Liberty Equality

Competition Cooperation

Cost Saving Generosity

2) This bill would most likely be supported by the:

Republican Party Democratic party

Factor #4

Would your voters support this bill?

Yes No

Because _____

Based on all four factors, how will you vote?

Yea Nay

Bill "B": Raise the Minimum Wage

Factor #1

Does Congress have the power to do this?

Yes No

Because _____

Factor #2

In your opinion, should this bill pass?

Yes No

Because _____

Factor #3

Which political party would likely support this bill?

1) Check the one value this bill stands for the most:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Liberty | <input type="checkbox"/> Equality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competition | <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Saving | <input type="checkbox"/> Generosity |

2) This bill would most likely be supported by the:

- Republican Party Democratic party

Factor #4

Would your voters support this bill?

Yes No

Because _____

Based on *all four factors*, how will you vote?

Yea Nay

Bill "C": Grant Titles of Nobility

Factor #1

Does Congress have the power to do this?

Yes No

Because _____

Factor #2

In your opinion, should this bill pass?

Yes No

Because _____

Factor #3

Which political party would likely support this bill?

1) Check the one value this bill stands for the most:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Liberty | <input type="checkbox"/> Equality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competition | <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Saving | <input type="checkbox"/> Generosity |

2) This bill would most likely be supported by the:

- Republican Party Democratic party

Factor #4

Would your voters support this bill?

Yes No

Because _____

Based on *all four factors*, how will you vote?

Yea Nay