

## The Great State

**Time Needed:**

One Class Period

**Materials Needed:**

Student Readings & Worksheets

**Copy Instructions:**

Double-side a class set of the reading pages, graphic organizers, and review pages.

**Learning Objectives**

Through this lesson students will be able to:

- Describe the essential characteristics of state government including the duties, functions, and districts associated with the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.
- Explain the daily impact that state agencies and commissions have on students' lives and property.
- Illustrate the law-making process at the state level.

## STEP BY STEP

- ANTICIPATE** the lesson by asking students the following question: "Can anyone name one way that the state you live in affects your daily life?"
- DISTRIBUTE** *The Great State* reading for students.
- READ** *The Great State* as a class, using active reading strategies with students such as:
  - circling key words and underlining the definitions or,
  - underlining the main idea sentence in each paragraph or,
  - number supporting pieces of evidence in each paragraph.
- DISTRIBUTE** the graphic organizer and display the graphic organizer transparency.
- WALK THROUGH** both transparencies of the graphic organizer with the students, allowing them to fill in the blanks.
- DISTRIBUTE** the review pages, introducing the instructions for each activity, and allow students to complete individually, in small groups, or as a class.
- REVIEW** student completion and answers as a check for understanding.

This lesson plan is part of the *State and Local Government* series by iCivics, Inc. a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing civic education. For more teaching resources, please visit [www.icivics.org/teachers](http://www.icivics.org/teachers) where you can access the state standards aligned to this lesson plan. Please provide feedback to [feedback@icivics.org](mailto:feedback@icivics.org).

©2011 iCivics, Inc. You may copy, distribute, or transmit this work for noncommercial purposes if you credit iCivics. All other rights reserved.

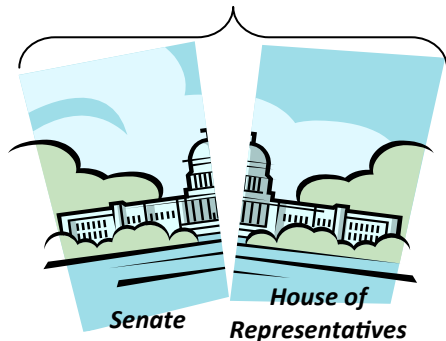
# The Great State

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

You've already learned about the United States Constitution. But did you know that states have constitutions too? Each state's constitution is structured a little bit differently, but most of them are a lot like the U.S. Constitution. Typically, they divide the state government into three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. In this lesson, you will examine the most common layout of state governments.



## Bicameral Legislature



## The State Legislative Branch

On the national level, the legislature is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives. This is called a "bicameral" legislature because it has two houses ("bi" means *two* and "cameral" means *chamber*). Most states (but not all) also have a bicameral legislature with a Senate and a House of Representatives. The main job of these houses is to create laws for the state. State legislatures are also responsible for dividing the state into legislative districts. The people in each district elect representatives to serve in the U.S. Congress and the state legislatures.

## The State Executive Branch

On the national level, the chief executive is called the president. On the state level, the chief executive is called the governor. The governor's role is to make sure state laws are carried out. In order to do this, the governor gives executive orders to state government organizations, such as the attorney general's office or the department of education. The governor has many other powers similar to the powers of the president. For example, governors can issue pardons and veto bills.



Courts of Appeals



Superior Courts



Municipal, City, or Justice Courts

## The State Judicial Branch

On the national level, the judicial branch is divided into many trial courts, fewer courts of appeals, and one Supreme Court. Most states also have this basic three-level system. Cases begin in the trial court. To fight a trial court's ruling, people must take their case to the court of appeals. Finally, the state Supreme Court reviews the decisions made by lower courts, supervises the other courts, and interprets the state constitution as it applies to the law.

But state judicial branches have an extra level of courts the national judicial branch does not have—a level *below* the trial courts. These lower courts handle the thousands of "small" issues that come up every day, such as traffic tickets and minor crimes called misdemeanors. This lower level of courts is necessary to keep all these minor cases from clogging up the regular courts, where more difficult cases are heard.

# The Great State

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

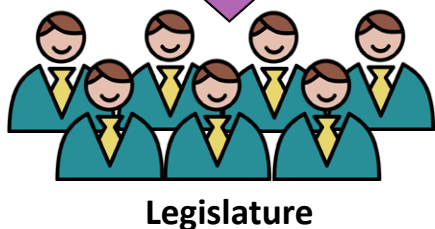
## Where Bills Come From

Who comes up with ideas for state laws? Only legislators may introduce a bill in either house, but their ideas come from lots of places. Some ideas come from the legislators themselves, from government agencies such as the state department of education, or even from the governor. Other ideas come from citizens who have an idea for a law that will benefit them and their community. But the majority of ideas come from **interest groups**. These are private groups that work to support special causes by trying to get laws passed that will help those causes. For example, there might be an interest group working to support disabled people or one that supports military veterans.



## Passing a Bill

In states with a bicameral legislature, the process is very similar to that of the U.S. Congress. First, a legislator introduces a bill in the state House of Representatives. The bill then goes to a committee—a small group of legislators that study bills that relate to a certain topic. The bill might be assigned to a subcommittee—an even smaller group that focused on a narrower topic. The subcommittee will research and study the bill, revise it, and send it back to the committee. After the committee approves the bill, the entire House of Representatives votes on it. If the bill passes, it goes to the other house of the legislature and follows the same process. If it is passed by both houses, legislators come together in a **conference committee** (a committee that includes members of both houses) to work out the differences.



## From a Bill to a Law

Once the conference committee is done with their work and both houses have approved the final product, it heads to the governor. The governor has two options: sign the bill into law, or keep the bill from becoming law by exercising the power to veto!



# The Great State

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



Each state constitution is structured  
 EXACTLY THE SAME or  A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENTLY.  
State constitutions are very similar to the U.S. Constitution because...

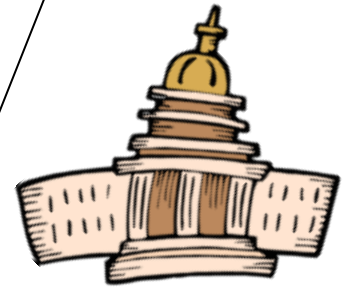


Bicameral means...

Most states have two houses known as the

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

The main job of the legislature is...



\_\_\_\_\_ Branch

State  
Government

Branch

State Chief Executive: \_\_\_\_\_  
The main job of the governor is to...  
To accomplish this, he or she gives orders to...

Four-level  
system

Branch

Lower Courts: Municipal, City and Justice Courts

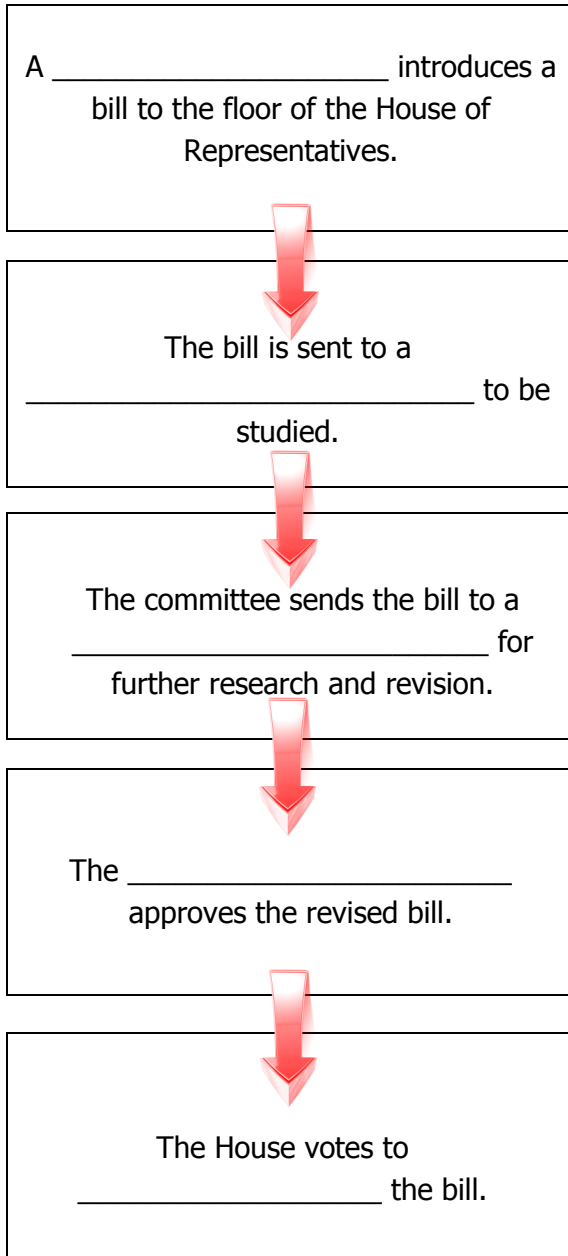


# The Great State

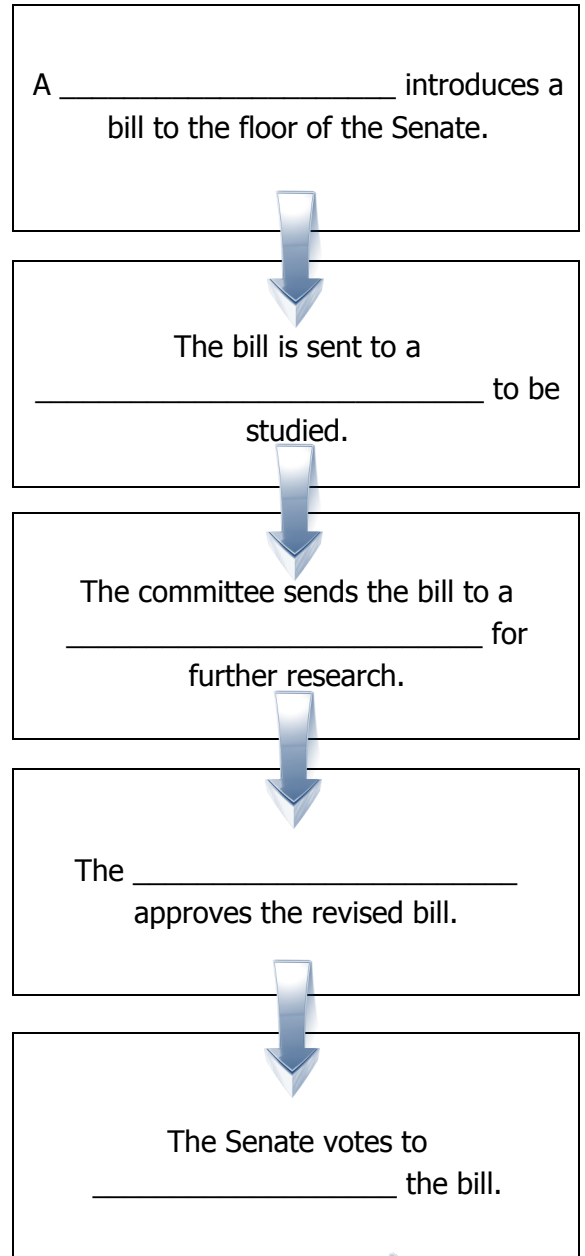
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**The Legislative Process** It takes many steps to get from a bill introduced on the floor to the desk of the governor. Let's pretend that a bill is going to start in the House of Representatives. Fill in the blanks to follow the bill all the way to the governor. (And remember the same process can happen when a bill is introduced in the Senate!)

## House of Representatives



## Senate



After a bill is approved by BOTH houses, a \_\_\_\_\_ works out the differences.

VETO?

**Governor**

APPROVE?

# The Great State


Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Matching.** Match each word with its definition.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1) Bicameral
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2) Legislature
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3) Interest groups
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4) Conference committee
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5) Three
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6) Court of appeals
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7) Governor
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8) Subcommittee


- A. A committee made up of members from both houses
- B. Private groups that support causes through legislation
- C. The chief executive at the state level
- D. A legislature that is composed of two houses
- E. Number of branches state governments usually have
- F. Hear disputed cases from the trial court
- G. Group of people that creates laws; Congress
- H. Group that focuses more narrowly than committees

**Name the Branch.** Circle the branch of government each character works for.


 I deal with misdemeanors and other small violations.

Executive    Judicial    Legislative

I work for an agency that helps enact the laws passed in Congress.




Executive    Judicial    Legislative

 I serve on a subcommittee that researches and revises bills.

Executive    Judicial    Legislative

I have the power to issue pardons and veto bills.



Executive    Judicial    Legislative

**Checklist.** Imagine that you are responsible for writing the constitution for a new state. Which powers would you include for each branch? Check the powers you would include and write in at least one power that isn't already listed.

## Executive Branch

Power to...

- Veto laws
- Appoint judges and the heads of executive agencies
- Declare a state of emergency
- Grant pardons
- Enact laws created by the legislature
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Legislative Branch

Power to...

- Create new laws
- Set the budget
- Set agreements with other states
- Override governor's veto
- Establish local courts
- Investigate other branches
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Judicial Branch

Power to...

- Interpret the U.S. Constitution
- Interpret the state constitution
- Settle controversies over elections
- Settle controversies over district boundaries
- Hear cases about state laws
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

# The Great State

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Fill in the Blank & Number.** Use the word bank to fill in the blanks below. After you have completed the sentence, *number* each (1-9) in the order it happens when a bill becomes a law.

<b>subcommittee</b>	<b>interest groups</b>	<b>similar</b>	<b>legislator</b>	<b>veto</b>	<b>voted</b>
<b>conference committee</b>	<b>committee</b>	<b>committee</b>	<b>researched &amp; revised</b>		

- \_\_\_\_\_ A bill is sent to a \_\_\_\_\_ to be studied in detail.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The subcommittee sends the \_\_\_\_\_ bill back to the committee for approval.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The committee sends the bill to a \_\_\_\_\_ to be researched and revised in more detail.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A \_\_\_\_\_ works out the differences in the two versions of the bill and submits it to the governor.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The idea of a bill comes from many places, but mostly from \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The bill is sent to the other house of congress to go through a \_\_\_\_\_ process.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The committee sends the approved bill back to the floor for consideration, where the bill is \_\_\_\_\_ on.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A \_\_\_\_\_ introduces the idea for a bill on the floor of his or her house of congress.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The governor decides whether to sign the bill into law or to \_\_\_\_\_ it.



**Did You Get the Memo?** Legislators have been writing memos about a bill! Read all the memos. Then put the memos in order according to the progress of the bill by numbering them from 1 to 6.

I thought you might be interested to know that I put forward a new topic on the floor of the House today. I hope that  you'll support it as...

At this point, it's up to the Governor. We've done all we can do, and she has to decide if she will sign it into law. Fingers  crossed...

The committee handed this bill to us yesterday. For the next few weeks we will be really busy researching, revising, and  improving this bill...

It's always nice to get to see members from the other house of congress. I hope we can quickly and easily work out the  differences between...

I had a meeting with an interest group today. They closely represent the voters in my district at home and they have a  interesting new idea...

Well, the subcommittee has done it's job. We think we've done our job. Now it will be up to all of you to approve or reject  the bill in a vote...

# The Great State

Name: \*\*TEACHER KEY\*\*


**Matching.** Match each word with its definition.

- D 1) Bicameral
- G 2) Legislature
- B 3) Interest groups
- A 4) Conference committee
- E 5) Three
- F 6) Court of appeals
- C 7) Governor
- H 8) Subcommittee

- A. A committee made up of members from both houses
- B. Private groups that support causes through legislation
- C. The chief executive at the state level
- D. A legislature that is composed of two houses
- E. Number of branches state governments usually have
- F. Hear disputed cases from the trial court
- G. Group of people that creates laws; Congress
- H. Group that focuses more narrowly than committees


**Name the Branch.** Circle the branch of government each character works for.

I deal with misdemeanors and other small violations.




Executive    Judicial    Legislative

I work for an agency that helps enact the laws passed in Congress.




Executive    Judicial    Legislative

I serve on a subcommittee that researches and revises bills.



Executive    Judicial    Legislative

I have the power to issue pardons and veto bills.



Executive    Judicial    Legislative

**Checklist.** Imagine that you are responsible for writing the constitution for a new state. Which powers would you include for each branch? Check the powers you would include and write in at least one power that isn't already listed.

## Executive Branch

Power to...

- Veto laws
- Appoint judges and the heads of executive agencies
- Declare a state of emergency
- Grant pardons
- Enact laws created by the legislature
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Legislative Branch

Power to...

- Create new laws
- Set the budget
- Set agreements with other states
- Override governor's veto
- Establish local courts
- Investigate other branches
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Judicial Branch

Power to...

- Interpret the U.S. Constitution
- Interpret the state constitution
- Settle controversies over elections
- Settle controversies over district boundaries
- Hear cases about state laws
- \_\_\_\_\_



# The Great State

Name: **\*\*TEACHER KEY\*\***

**Fill in the Blank & Number.** Use the word bank to fill in the blanks below. After you have completed the sentence, *number* each (1-9) in the order it happens when a bill becomes a law.

<b>subcommittee</b>	<b>interest groups</b>	<b>similar</b>	<b>legislator</b>	<b>veto</b>	<b>voted</b>
<b>conference committee</b>	<b>committee</b>	<b>committee</b>	<b>researched &amp; revised</b>		

- \_\_\_3\_\_\_ A bill is sent to a committee to be studied in detail.
- \_\_\_5\_\_\_ The subcommittee sends the researched and revised bill back to the committee for approval.
- \_\_\_4\_\_\_ The committee sends the bill to a subcommittee to be researched and revised in more detail.
- \_\_\_7\_\_\_ A conference committee works out the differences in the two versions of the bill and submits it to the governor.
- \_\_\_1\_\_\_ The idea of a bill comes from many places, but mostly from interest groups.
- \_\_\_6\_\_\_ The bill is sent to the other house of congress to go through a similar process.
- \_\_\_8\_\_\_ The committee sends the approved bill back to the floor for consideration, where the bill is voted on.
- \_\_\_2\_\_\_ A legislator introduces the idea for a bill on the floor of his or her house of congress.
- \_\_\_9\_\_\_ The governor decides whether to sign the bill into law or to veto it.



**Did You Get the Memo?** Legislators have been writing memos about a bill! Read all the memos. Then put the memos in order according to the progress of the bill by numbering them from 1 to 6.

I thought you might be interested to know that I put forward a new topic on the floor of the House today. I hope that <input type="text" value="2"/> you'll support it as...	At this point, it's up to the Governor. We've done all we can do, and she has to decide if she will sign it into law. Fingers <input type="text" value="6"/> crossed...	The committee handed this bill to us yesterday. For the next few weeks we will be really busy researching, revising, and <input type="text" value="3"/> improving this bill...
It's always nice to get to see members from the other house of congress. I hope we can quickly and easily work out the <input type="text" value="5"/> differences between...	I had a meeting with an interest group today. They closely represent the voters in my district at home and they have a <input type="text" value="1"/> interesting new idea...	Well, the subcommittee has done it's job. We think we've done our job. Now it will be up to all of you to approve or reject <input type="text" value="4"/> the bill in a vote...