

*Did My Bill Pass? – A Model Legislature Teacher’s Guide

Preparation

A couple of days before beginning the simulation, you should do several things:

1. Find out something about your students’ political leanings. The packet includes two methods for doing this (a class political survey and an individual survey; see pages 5–7). Use the surveys as a lead-in to discussing:
 - The political spectrum and the bell-shaped curve.
 - What positions are considered liberal and conservative.
 - Where the Democrats and Republicans stand on the issues (you could have your students research party platforms).
2. Go over key terms and other legislative basics, such as how a bill becomes law.
3. Have students begin doing research for their bills (see the “Region Data Sheet” in the “Research and Bill Setup”).
4. Do the good bill/bad bill activity. There are three bill samples in this packet. One is a short bill on affordable housing. While it doesn’t cover everything, it does contain clear provisions and money to pay for itself. The other two—“Clean up the Bay” and “Stop Teenage Smoking”—are vague policy statements and lack enforcement provisions. You could also have the students write a practice bill on something that pertains to their school or personal lives (an open campus, better food, longer library hours). ***Doing this activity is important. Most students do NOT know how to write enforceable provisions. Spending time getting the students to understand the difference between policy and provision will result in better bills and a better outcome.***

The Simulation

Day 1: Organization

1. Go over the instructions.
2. Open the legislative session, then:

Break the class into party caucuses and have each caucus:

- Elect its leaders:
 - Majority – Pro Tem or Speaker, majority leader and whip
 - Minority – minority leader and whip
- Strategize and decide on its legislative agenda.
- Take committee assignment requests.
- Get volunteers to write bills important to their parties or their regions. Have the rest of the party members write bills on other subjects. Students need to write bills for homework and bring typed copies of them to class on Day 2.

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Before the next class, decide which students to assign to which committees. So that it’s easy to manage, I make the committee assignments and pick the committee chairs. I appoint good leaders to be the chairs. The packet contains handouts with committee names and descriptions, as well as a sample and some templates. You can use the committee setup template for making the assignments.

* Excerpted and abbreviated