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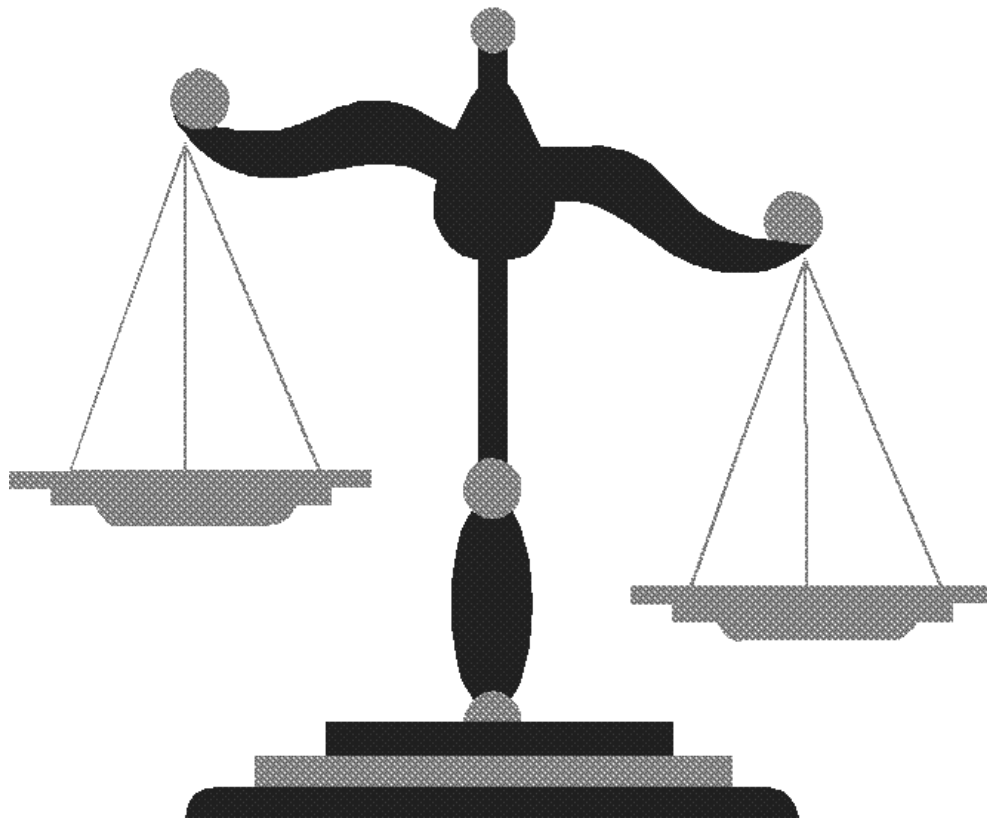
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i Think: Government

Legislative Branch



by Kendra Corr
and Sharon Coletti

** It is the goal of InspirEd Educators to create instructional materials that are interesting, engaging, and challenging. Our student-centered approach incorporates both content and skills, placing particular emphasis on reading, writing, vocabulary development, and critical and creative thinking in the content areas.

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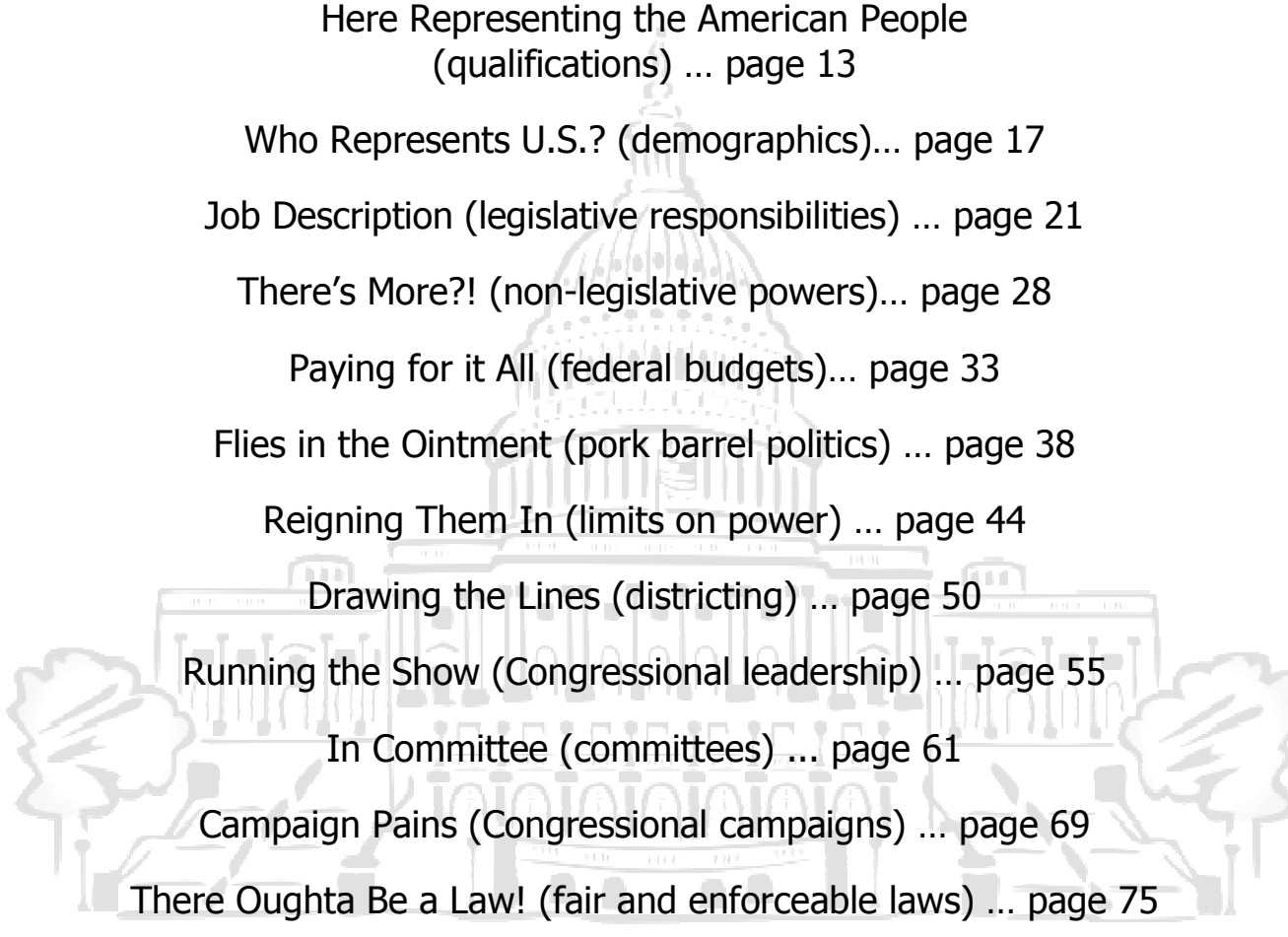
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Building a House

Springboard:

Students should complete “Putting Forth a Plan.”

(Possible answers include: 1. Large states would favor the Virginia Plan because it bases representation on population; 2. Smaller states would think the New Jersey plan is more fair based on one vote per state; 3. Student’s plans will vary.)

Objective: The student will be able to describe the characteristics of the American legislative branch.

Materials:

Putting Forth a Plan (Springboard handout)
Legislatures Around the World (handout)
What Makes U.S. Special? (handout)

Terms to know:

legislature - law making body
bicameral - having two separate assemblies
judiciary - the courts and/or the judges that oversee them
unicameral - having one assembly

Procedure:

- After reviewing the Springboard, explain that in the end the founding fathers settled the conflict by creating a bicameral legislature, in which the Senate reflects the equality of the states (each state has two representatives) and the House of Representatives, which reflects the fair representation of the people (each state gets representatives, or votes, based on population). Go on to explain that this lesson further examines the characteristics of the American legislative branch.
- Distribute “Legislatures Around the World” and “What Makes U.S. Special?” The student(s) should work individually or in pairs to study the chart and complete the analysis form.
- Have them share their answers and discuss.

Putting Forth a Plan



In a democracy power is held by the citizens, the people of the nation. However the citizens don't make the laws or write checks from government accounts! In a representative democracy, people are chosen to conduct the government's business. When America's founding fathers created our government, they had to decide who would represent the people. In 1787 two plans were proposed to decide how our government would be structured. Among other things the plans addressed the national legislature, or legislative branch. Read the two plans and answer the questions below:

<i>The Virginia Plan</i>	<i>The New Jersey Plan</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The U.S. government would have three branches.• The legislature would be bicameral with the lower house elected by the people and the upper house chosen by members of the lower house.• Each state would have members in both houses of the legislature based on their populations. Large, populated states would have more representatives; smaller states fewer.• The legislature would choose the president.• The legislature would choose the judiciary, or members of the courts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The U.S. government would have three branches.• The legislature would be unicameral and include one representative from each state.• The representatives would be elected by the people.• Each representative would have one vote.• The executive would be elected by members of the legislature.• The judiciary would be chosen by the executive.

1. Which states do you think would have favored the Virginia Plan? Why?

2. Which states do you think would have favored the New Jersey Plan? Why?

3. If you were there in 1787 and could have proposed a plan, what would you have suggested?

Legislatures Around the World



Country	Type of Legislature	Assembly(ies)	Size	How Elected	Term(s) of Office
Brazil	Bicameral	Federal Senate	81 members	Direct popular vote	8 years
		Chamber of Deputies	531 members	Direct popular vote	4 years
Costa Rica	Unicameral	Legislative Assembly	57 members	Direct popular vote	4 years
Finland	Unicameral	Parliament	200 members	Direct popular vote	4 years
France	Bicameral	National Assembly	577 members	Direct popular vote	5 years
		Senate	331 members	Electoral college	6 years
India	Bicameral	Council of States	No more than 250 members	Up to 12 appointed by president, rest are chosen by members of state assemblies	6 years
		People's Assembly	545 members	All but 2 are elected by direct popular vote, others are appointed by president	5 years
Israel	Unicameral	Knesset	120 members	Direct popular vote	4 years
Japan	Bicameral	House of Councillors	252 members	Direct popular vote	6 years
		House of Representatives	512 members	Direct popular vote	4 years
Saudi Arabia	Unicameral	Consultative Council	60 members	Appointed by the king	No term limit
Singapore	Unicameral	Parliament	84 members	Direct popular vote	4 years
United States	Bicameral	Senate	100 members	Direct popular vote	6 years
		House of Representatives	435 members	Direct popular vote	2 years
Zambia	Unicameral	National Assembly	158 members	150 by direct popular vote; 8 appointed by the president	5 years

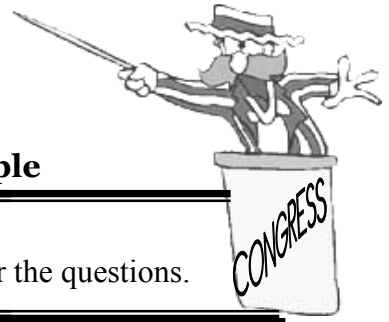
What Makes U.S. Special?

1. Compare and contrast the U.S. legislature to one other country on the chart.
2. Which country's legislature seems to be **MOST** like that of the United States?
3. Which country's legislature seems to be **LEAST** like that of the United States?
4. What do you think can be assumed about countries that have small numbers of members? Large numbers of members?
5. What makes India, Saudi Arabia, and Zambia different from others on the chart? Why do you think these legislatures differ?
6. Why do you think some countries have bicameral legislatures and others have unicameral legislatures?
7. Why do you think terms of office are different for different assemblies?
8. Do you think it is important for legislatures to be elected by direct popular vote? Why or why not?

What Makes Special?

Suggested Answers

1. Compare and contrast the U.S. legislature to one other country on the chart.
Answers will vary, but the student(s) should point out ways that the U.S. Congress is similar to and different from another legislature on the chart.
2. Which country's legislature seems to be **MOST** like that of the United States?
Answers will vary, but the student(s) should choose a country with a bicameral legislature, elected by direct popular vote.
3. Which country's legislature seems to be **LEAST** like that of the United States?
Answers will vary; students can pick a country with a unicameral legislature, or one that has appointed members.
4. What do you think can be assumed about countries that have small numbers of members? Large numbers of members?
Answers will vary, but student(s) should reason that countries with smaller legislatures probably have smaller populations than countries (such as India or the U.S.) with larger numbers of members.
5. What makes India, Saudi Arabia, and Zambia different from others on the chart? Why do you think these legislatures differ?
These countries allow the president to pick all or some of the legislature members. The student(s) may reason that these are countries where the branches of government are not separate, as they are in the U.S.
6. Why do you think some countries have bicameral legislatures and others have unicameral legislatures?
Answers will vary but should be well reasoned. Possible answers may include: small populations; less powerful legislatures; etc.
7. Why do you think terms of office are different for different assemblies?
Answers will vary but should be well reasoned. Possibilities may include: different assemblies have more or less power; the desire to make members more accountable to the voters; etc.
8. Do you think it is important for legislatures to be elected by direct popular vote? Why?
Answers will vary, but the student(s) should realize that legislature members are meant to represent the will of the people. Therefore, it follows that they should be chosen by the people.



Here Representing the American People

Springboard:

Students should read “Why Do You Think...?” and answer the questions.

Objective: The student will be able to explain the basic qualifications for serving in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

Materials: Why Do You Think...? (Springboard handout)
Call your Congressman (or Woman) (handout)

Terms to know: **qualification** - quality, ability, or accomplishment that makes a person suitable for a particular position

Procedure:

- After discussing the Springboard, explain that *in this lesson the student(s) will learn about the senators and representatives who represent them.*
- Hand out “Call your Congressman (or Woman)” and review the directions. The student(s) can work individually, in pairs, or small groups to search the Internet to learn about their U.S. senators and representatives. Senate information can be found @ **www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm** and search by their state. The student(s) can learn about their House representatives @ **www.house.gov/**, searching by zip code. Both sites offer links to the legislative members’ websites, which should provide most of the details needed.
- When the student(s) have completed the graphic organizer, have them share what they learned and discuss. During the discussion have the student(s) highlight what they consider to be necessary qualifications for serving in the Senate and/or House of Representatives. (*Answers will vary but could include: leadership skills; organization; compassion for others; desire to serve their state’s citizens; integrity; good education and/or proven success in another field or lower office; etc.*)



Why Do You Think...?

The Constitution gave all legislative Powers to a “Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.” Elections are held every two years for representatives and every six years for senators. The Constitution requires that Congress meet at least once a year and record what occurs, most of which becomes public record. Members of both houses are paid for their service.

House members must be at least twenty-five years old, U.S. citizens, and residents of the states they represent. If for any reason, a representative is unable to serve the full two-year term, his/her state’s governor appoints someone to do so. Representatives choose the speaker of the house and other officers from among their ranks, and this legislative body is responsible for bringing charges of impeachment against federal officials, if necessary.

The Senate is made up of two senators from each state. Senators must be at least thirty, have been U.S. citizens for at least nine years, and live in the states they represent. The vice president serves as president of the senate but does not vote unless the body is evenly split on an issue. Senators choose their other officers, including a president pro tempore. The “president pro tem,” as the job is usually called, acts as president of the Senate if the vice president cannot.

The Senate is responsible for trying any charges of impeachment brought by the House. If 2/3 of the Senate finds an official guilty, he/she is removed from office and barred from further service. If members of either legislative body “misbehave,” such cases are handled by their peers. If serious, members can be expelled by 2/3 agreement.

Why Do You Think qualifications and terms of office differ for senators and representatives? _____

	... the Founding Fathers decided members of Congress should be paid? _____

	... Congress must keep records and make them public? _____

Why Do You Think...? Suggested Answers & Explanations

The Constitution gave all legislative Powers to a "Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives." Elections are held every two years for representatives and every six years for senators. The Constitution requires that Congress meet at least once a year and record what occurs, most of which becomes public record. Members of both houses are paid for their service.

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... qualifications and terms of office differ for senators and representatives? ***Modeled somewhat after the British Parliament, the U.S. legislature has an upper house, the Senate, and a lower house, the House of Representatives. Representatives have to be re-elected every two years, which helps keep them accountable to the people. 1/3 of Senators are elected every two years for six-year terms to provide greater stability.***

... the Founding Fathers decided members of Congress should be paid? ***This practice actually dates back to the Ancient Greeks, who found that paying their lawmakers allowed a wider variety of people to participate in government. More practically, lawmakers must maintain households in their home state and pay to live in D.C. as well. Their paychecks help to defray these costs.***

... Congress must keep records and make them public? ***The government of the United States is designed to be "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Having open records of proceedings allows Americans to know most of what is going on in Washington, so they can vote for their representation accordingly. Some matters of national security can be kept secret if 1/5 of the body votes to do so.***

... both houses of Congress are involved in the process of impeachment? ***The process for impeachment provides a check on the powers of the other branches. Executives and federal judges may be impeached for "high crimes and misdemeanors." The two legislative houses must agree, though. The House brings the charges and the Senate tries the accused. If the accused is found guilty, he/she is removed from office. Criminal or misdemeanor charges may then be filed by the Justice System.***

Why Do You Think?



DIRECTIONS: Each state has two senators and one representative from each Congressional district, the total number based on population. Read about your two senators and your district's representative to learn about each.

Legislator's name _____	Position _____
Age _____	Party _____ Years in Congress _____
Education:	
Past Experience:	
Qualifications:	
Committee work and/or legislation sponsored:	

Legislator's name _____	Position _____
Age _____	Party _____ Years in Congress _____
Education:	
Past Experience:	
Qualifications:	
Committee work and/or legislation sponsored:	

Legislator's name _____	Position _____
Age _____	Party _____ Years in Congress _____
Education:	
Past Experience:	
Qualifications:	
Committee work and/or legislation sponsored:	

Who Represents U.S.?



Springboard:

Students should complete the “Focus on the Issues” handout.
(Answers will vary but should spark discussion.)

Objective: The student will be able to describe the demographics of Congress.

Materials:

Focus on the Issues (Springboard handout)
The 101st U.S. Congress (handout)
Do They REALLY Represent U.S.? (handout)

Terms to know:

demographics - characteristics of a group of people
atheist - one who holds no belief in God or other deities

Procedure:

- After reviewing the Springboard, explain that in this lesson the student(s) will study the demographics of a recent Congress (elected in 2006) to compare to the American public.
- Distribute “The 101st U.S. Congress” and have the student(s) read the information.
- Then, distribute “Do They REALLY Represent U.S.?” and have the student(s) work independently, in pairs, or small groups to conduct Internet research to fill in the requested data. *(Data may vary slightly based on sources and dates, but the percentages should be similar for each group.)*
- Have the student(s) share and compare their answers and discuss the following questions:
 - ? What group(s) do you think are over or under-represented in Congress?
(Answers will vary but historically, women and minorities are under-represented. Conversely, men, whites, and professionals tend to be over-represented.)
 - ? Do you think that Congress is diverse enough? Why? *(Answers will vary.)*
 - ? What surprised you about the data you examined? *(Answers will vary.)*
 - ? Based on the demographic information, do you think Congress truly represents the people of the United States? Why or why not? *(Answers will vary but should be supported.)*

