

Tennessee Secretary of State

Civics Lesson Plans

Roles of Elected Officials

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Grade Level: High School

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Introduction:

We have all heard about the President, Vice President, Senators, and Congressmen. But how many of us know the roles that each of the elected officials carry out? This lesson is designed to help students learn about the qualifications for each of these offices and what they do.

Guiding Questions:

- Where do I go to find information about the qualifications for each office?
- What are the duties of each of these elected officials?
- Do you know who your elected officials are?

Learning Objectives: In the course of the lesson, students will...

- Analyze the foundation of American government and how our democracy was designed.
- Understand the roles of their elected officials, including president, vice president, senators, and congressmen.
- Examine how elected officials carry out their constitutional duties and other roles.

Curriculum Standards:

GC.1 Cite textual evidence and evaluate multiple points of view to analyze the influence of ancient Greek, Roman, and leading European political thinkers such as John Locke, Charles-Louis Montesquieu, Niccolo Machiavelli, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and William Blackstone on the development of United States government.

GC. 9 Analyze Article I of the Constitution as it relates to the legislative branch, including eligibility for office and lengths of terms of representatives and senators; election to office; the roles of the House and Senate in impeachment proceedings; the role of the vice president; the enumerated legislative powers; and the process by which a bill becomes law. (P)

GC. 11 Identify current representatives from Tennessee in the legislative branch of the national government. (P, TN)

GC.12 Analyze Article II of the Constitution as it relates to the executive branch, including eligibility for office and length of term, election to and removal from office, the oath of office, and the enumerated executive powers. (P)

Materials Needed:

- Copy of the U.S. Constitution (*Tennessee Blue Book*, [pgs. 519-534](#))
- Internet access
- Poster board
- Notecard

Background:

[Qualifications for Elected Offices \(Division of Elections\)](#)

[WhiteHouse.gov](#)

[U.S. Senate](#)

[U.S. House of Representatives](#)

Lesson Activities:

Activity 1

- Ask the students: What is a **democracy**? What is a **republic**?
- Have students look up the words from various sources (dictionary, history/government textbooks, internet, etc.) Note the similarities and differences.
- Work toward a class consensus.
- After you have come to an agreement, discuss how and why America's Founding Fathers chose to set up the government the way they did. Direct students to look at the events leading to the American Revolution and particularly at the events from the years immediately after the war until the Constitutional Convention.
- To transition to the lesson activities, ask students the below questions and record their answers on the board.
 - What are the duties of an elected official?
 - Is this enough, too much, or just right?
 - What would you think this role should be?
 - How and why did you come to this conclusion?
 - Can you name any of your elected officials on the federal, state, or local level?

Activity 2

- Break the students into five (5) groups and assign each group one of the following: **president, vice president, senator, congressman**, and **"How a Bill Becomes a Law."**
 - Note: If possible try to have at least two groups for each office so they can check each other for any missing information. Give each group a poster board and note cards.
- For students in the elected official groups, students should research their assigned leader's roles in the U.S. Constitution. Analyze the unique roles and responsibilities of each office from the Constitution. They should include eligibility requirements, lengths of terms, and any other powers given to that office in the Constitution.
 - Note: Throughout history there have been powers given that are not enumerated in the Constitution. These are known as "implied powers." Using a government textbook or the internet, students can look at how these powers have impacted America.
 - Have the groups make a poster board with the information.

- For students in the “How a Bill Becomes a Law” group, have them create a poster that describes the process of how a bill becomes a law. Make sure they note the differences between how this is done in the House versus the Senate. Below are some resources for the students to explore:
 - [U.S. Senate, Legislative Process: how a Senate Bill Becomes a Law](#)
 - [U.S. House of Representatives, The Legislative Process](#)
 - [Tennessee General Assembly, How a Bill Becomes a Law](#)
 - [Tennessee Secretary of State, Civics Website, Lawmaking](#)
- Each group could also make a set of flash cards (one each) for all of the information they discover to be used to review for assessment.
- When groups are finished, put up the posters and have each group present about what they learned, starting with the elected officials.
- Have students make notecards with the words “president,” “vice president,” “senator,” and “congressman” on them. After the “How a Bill Becomes a Law” poster is presented, have students place the notecards on the poster where that elected official influences the lawmaking process. For example, one place that “president” could go next to the part of the poster that explains that the president signs bills into law.

Further Discussion:

Do our elected officials operate as a trustee or as delegates?

Consider this quote from Edmund Burke: “Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”

Assessment:

If you wish you could prepare a test covering the material studied, having one large test or individual tests for each office.

An alternative to an exam is to assign an essay. Students can respond to the above quote from Burke and expand on class discussion with the following additional prompts:

- Based on your understanding of the roles of our elected officials, argue whether elected officials should be a trustee, delegate, or a combination of both. Support your answer with the U.S. Constitution, local tradition, and your own research.
- Give examples of how politicians have been one or the other and how this has impacted their chances for re-election. Take a current policy issue, research the stances of several politicians, and determine which type of representative they may have chosen to be.

Extension Options:

- Take the information on how a bill becomes a law and have the students make this into a board game. If you have some computer science students, perhaps they could even find a way to create an online game.
- Using online sources, have student analyze presidential speeches. Have students evaluate these speeches focusing on what they say in relation to the duties you have discovered.
 - [Library of Congress “I Do Solemnly Swear” Collection](#)
 - [Presidential Libraries](#)
 - [Newsela.com](#)
- Have students compare the constitutional duties of the elected offices versus their more unofficial expectations. Also, students can evaluate the outlined qualifications for office in the constitution versus the unofficial qualifications voters expect of their candidates (ex: experience, business knowledge, etc.)
- You could have them look through a chart of all of the U.S. presidents to date. Have them make note of similarities, differences, or any other notable information and then have them share their findings. Have students analyze how the roles have changed. If you have time you could do this with the Tennessee General Assembly since 1796.
- Have students compare the process of how a bill becomes a law on the federal and state levels. What is different and what is the same? How are the roles of the elected officials different between the two levels of government in the lawmaking process?