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Grades 9-12
United States Congress
Based on in-class research and the simulation, how does Congress function and how does the media affect sessions on bills?
SS.7.C.3.8: Analyze the structure, functions, and processes of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

SS.7.C.2.10: Examine the impact of media, individuals, and interest groups on monitoring and influencing government.

SS.912.C.2.15: Evaluate the origins and roles of political parties, interest groups, media, and individuals in determining and shaping public policy.

SS.912.W.1.3: Interpret and evaluate primary and secondary sources.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson, student will learn about the United States Congress. They will learn about the structure of Congress, who its members are, and its legislative process. Students will use various media sources to learn about different parts of Congress and what they influence.

**LESSON CONTENT**

This lesson will cover how the United States Congress is structured and what each portion influences. It will also be an introduction to the political parties and their influence on the legislative process within Congress.

**STUDENT GROUPING**

While performing research, students will work individually. This is so students all have background knowledge because research was done individually.

For the simulation, the class will work in three groups. One of those groups will only have two members while the other two groups will have the rest of the class split in two. The small group will be independent parties while the two larger groups will be the Republican and Democratic parties in Congress. This is so students can see how powerful the Republican and Democratic parties are in Congress versus all independent parties.

**METHODS**

* Teacher Lecture- This allows the instructor to introduce the United States Congress and the simulation to give students an idea of what to research when they move into the research part of the class.
* Simulation- The class will participate in a simulation where the class is broken down into groups so students can see the impact the two largest political parties have in Congress. The simulation will increase students’ analytical skills development. The simulation will also include media polls to help students learn how to change their thinking during an activity based on new facts.
* Discussion- The instructor will lead a de-brief discussion at the end of the simulation so students can discuss how Congress worked.

**ACTIVITIES**
Day 1:

Introduction:

-Students will be introduced to the United States Congress by the teacher by explaining, through a lecture, that Congress is made up of two houses, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The teacher will also explain to the students that they will be participating in a simulation of a session in Congress using an example bill provided by the teacher.

Main Activity:

-Students will be assigned a political party: Republican, Democrat, or Independent. They can choose their state but states cannot overlap within political parties. Students will then be given a list of media websites to use for research while in the computer lab.

<http://www.house.gov/>

<http://clerk.house.gov/>

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>

<http://www.c-span.org/questions/>

<http://www.c-span.org/guide/congress/glossary/alphalist.asp>

 -Before starting in the computer lab students will be given the bill they will be arguing. They will then begin their research individually until the last ten minutes of class.

Closing:

-The class will be told their research will continue the next day and they should start working on their arguments while also researching what their role is within Congress so they can know their powers.

Homework: Attached worksheet

Day 2:

Introduction:

-The class will be reminded of the topic of their bill and their political party before they begin research again. This day the political parties can begin researching as a group to work on their arguments. Students will be informed each student must participate at least once during the simulation as part of their grade.

Main Activity:

-The political parties will research the bill topic together as a group using the given media options to create their arguments. Their arguments must go along with their political parties.

Closing:

-The class will be reminded that the following class will have the simulation and there may be a surprise during the simulation.

Day 3:

Introduction:

-Students will be asked to get out any notes they have for their arguments and to move to the area of the classroom assigned to their political party. The bill they will be arguing will be put up on the overhead projector as a reminder and students will be reminded each student must speak at least once during the session as part of their grade.

Main Activity:

-Students will be able to speak during the simulation if they raise their hand and they are called on so the simulation stays under control. The arguments will go back and forth between the political parties until one third of the way through the assigned time for the simulation. At this time, the instructor will give the students a set of media polls showing how the public feels about the bill they are arguing. This should change how the students are arguing the bill. Another set of media polls will be given after the second third of the simulation. At the end of the simulation, the class will decide which political party made the best arguments.

Closing:

-The class will have a de-brief discussion to talk about how they felt the simulation went and how the media polls changed the session. They will also discuss how the political parties affected the Congress session and how efficient the Congress session was when only arguing one bill compared to how the real Congress sessions are. The students will also vote on whether they would want to pass or fail the bill.

**MATERIALS**

* List of research websites- If students are given a list of acceptable websites, they are able to do research that the instructor knows is correct.
* Bill students will debate- The instructor will give students the bill so they know what they need to research.
* Poll numbers for during debate- The poll numbers will be used to show students how the media affects what happens in Congress.
* Worksheet for end of simulation- The end of simulation worksheet will ask student several questions to make sure they understood the information from the lesson.

**EVALUATION**

Students will be evaluated on their homework assignment after the first class to see how much they were able to find in their research. The worksheets are used because they are a way for the instructor to make sure the students know enough material before they do research on the specific bill topic. They will also be evaluated on the worksheet after the simulation to see how much the students remember from the first worksheet and how much they understood the assigned bill. The other evaluation is the participation points given during the simulation. The participation points are meant to keep the students involved in the simulation. These types of evaluation were chosen because they give the instructor a way to make sure the students learn the material while still keeping the maximum amount of class time available for the lesson.

Worksheet For Congress Lesson

Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1) What are the two branches of Congress?

2) Who is the head of the House of Representatives?

3) What political party were you assigned? What were the other two political parties?

4) Do you believe Congress would have passed the bill argued in class? Why or why not?

**A BILL TO BAN CELL PHONE USAGE WHILE DRIVING**

1. **Whereas**, thousands of people are killed in car accidents each year in the United

2. States due to cell phone usage while driving, and

**3. Whereas**, hundreds of thousands more are injured in the US by the combination 4. of texting and driving, and

**5. Whereas**, cell phone usage increases the chances of being involved in an

6. accidents by 400%, and

**7. Whereas**, cell phone usage is unnecessary while driving, except in emergency

8. situations, and

9. **Whereas**, cell phone usage impairs the driver’s ability to react in a timely manner

10. much like alcohol, and

11. **Whereas**, car accidents caused by cell phone usage are one of the most

12. preventable causes of death in the United States,

13. **BE IT RESOLVED**, by the Congress here assembled that cell

14. phone usage be banned while driving except in emergency situations.

Day 1 Homework Worksheet

1. Which party controlled the Senate before the elections? How many seats did each party have?

2. How many seats does each party currently have in the Senate?

3. How did the elections change the balance of power in the Senate? Which party now selects the Senate Majority Leader and all the Senate committee chairs?

4. Which party controlled the House before the elections? How many seats did this party have? How many seats are needed to control the House?

5. Which party has a majority in the House after the elections? Did they gain or lose seats in this election?

6. What is the significance of one party controlling both houses of Congress and the White House?