



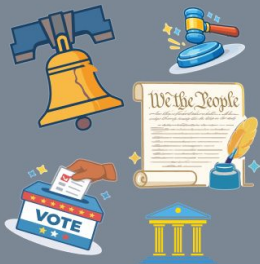
Student Workbook

Course 6

Grades 6–8

**How Laws Are
Made
(And Why You
Should Care)**





How Laws Are Made

(And Why You Should Care)



Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Lawmaking Process

Jump In: Can You Predict the Process? *pages 2-5*

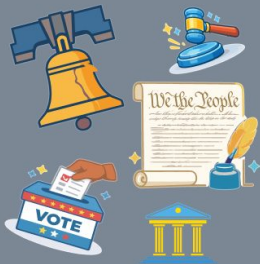
Show: You're In Congress Now *pages 6-7*

Chapter 2

Federal vs State Authority

Jump In: Who Gets to Decide? *pages 8-10*

Show: Federalism in Real Life *pages 11-20*



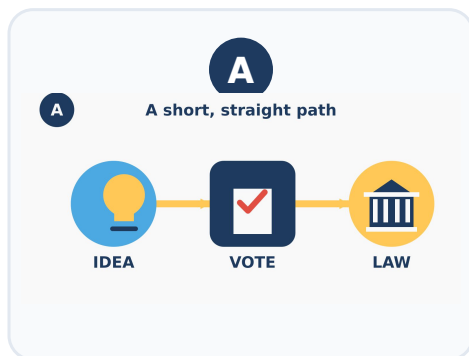
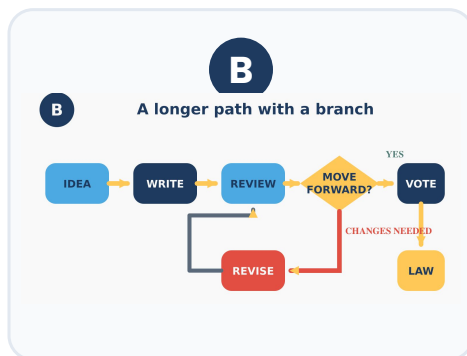
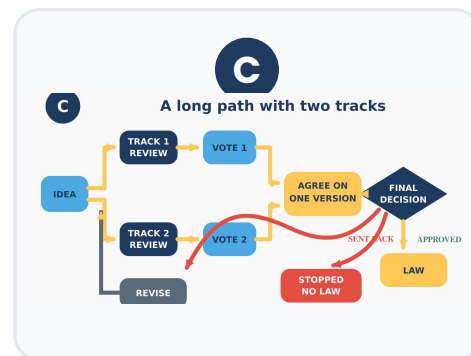
How Laws Are Made

(And Why You Should Care)

Jump In

Can You Predict the Process?

How do ideas actually become laws? Before learning the real process, test your instincts. Somebody had an idea. Years later, it's a law that affects your school, your phone, or your lunch.



Answer the question in the response box below.

Which diagram do you think shows how a bill really becomes a law? **The goal is to think it through, not to be right.** Start your answer with the letter you picked, then explain your thinking using the sentence frames.

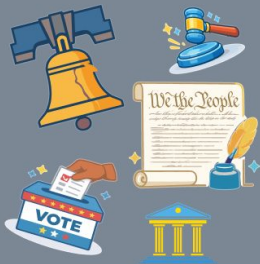
I chose Diagram because

The clue that helped me decide was

Should making laws be quick and simple, or slow and careful?

There's no right answer here — people argue about this seriously. Explain what you think in 1–2 sentences.

I think lawmaking should be _____ because _____



How Laws Are Made

(And Why You Should Care)

Jump In

Can You Predict the Process?

Here's What Actually Happens

The video, "[I'm Just a Bill](#)" explains one of the most important processes in American government.

As you watch, count: **How many separate steps** does the bill go through before it becomes a law?

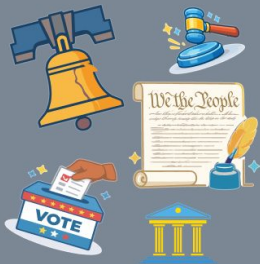
Also notice:

- Which people and which parts of government touch the bill along the way
- Every place where the bill could stop and never become a law



The bill in the video almost doesn't make it. Several times, it could have stopped and never become a law.

Was that a problem, or was that the point? Explain your thinking.

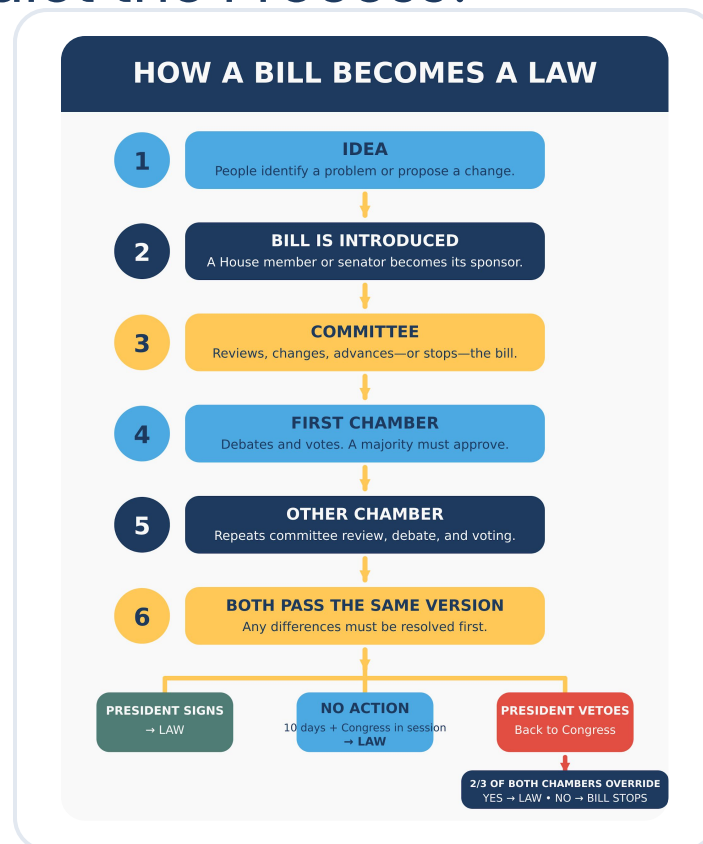


How Laws Are Made

(And Why You Should Care)

Jump In

Can You Predict the Process?

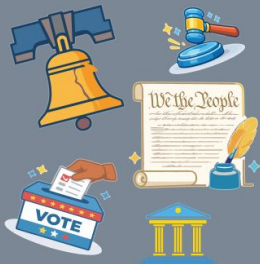


Answer the questions below. What did you get right? What surprised you? Use the sentence frames to explain.

I originally chose Diagram _____

After watching the video, I realized _____

because _____



How Laws Are Made

(And Why You Should Care)

Show You're in Congress Now

You've traced how an idea becomes a law: introduced by a member, studied in committee, voted on in both chambers, signed or vetoed by the president. Now you're going to try it.

In this simulation, you are a newly elected member of the House of Representatives. You'll choose a district to represent, read letters from the people who live there, and look at survey data to find out what they care about.

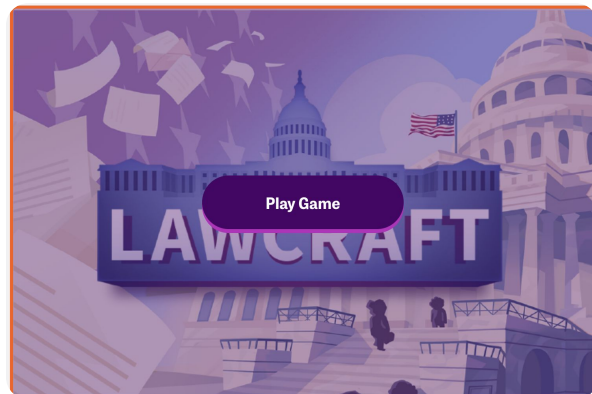


To become a law, your bill has to get through committee, pass the House, pass the Senate, and survive the president. Accept too few changes and your bill dies. Accept too many, and you end up with a law your constituents never asked for. *And your constituents are watching.*

LawCraft

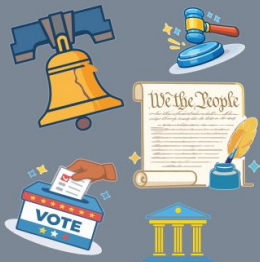
LawCraft is a simulation game in iCivics. Access the game here:
<https://tinyurl.com/lawcrafticivics>

- The game takes about 20–30 minutes to play through once.
- You don't need an account to play.
- Includes Spanish translation, English voiceover, and a glossary.
- Play multiple times to represent different districts.



Your Mission

- Choose a district and get to know the people you represent
- Read their letters and study the survey data to find an issue that matters to them
- Draft a bill
- Negotiate your way through committee, the House, the Senate, and the president's desk
- Get it passed — without giving away the thing that made it worth writing



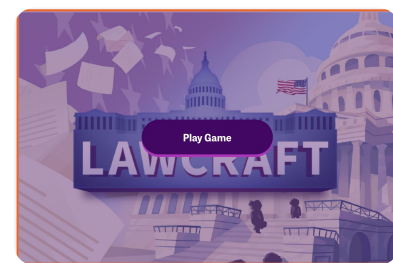
How Laws Are Made

(And Why You Should Care)

Show Reflection Questions

After you've played the game, answer the four reflection questions.

1. Who did you represent, and what did they want? Name the district you chose and the issue you picked. Why did that issue matter to the people who lived there?



2. What did you have to give up? To get a bill passed, you had to accept changes you didn't choose. Name one. Did that change make your bill better, worse, or just different? Explain.

3. Where did your bill come closest to dying? Committee? The House vote? The Senate? The president? What happened, and what did you do about it?

4. Back to your prediction. At the start of this chapter, you guessed whether lawmaking should be quick and simple or slow and careful. Now that you've been through it — **do you still think what you thought?** Explain in 2–3 sentences.



Jump In

You already live under more than one set of rules.

Your family makes some. Your school makes others. Most of the time you barely notice, because everybody stays in their lane. Let's find out where those lanes are.

Which of these does your FAMILY decide? Which of these does your SCHOOL decide?

Who Decides?	Family	School
What time you go to bed		
What's on your math test		
How much time you spend on screens		
What you eat for dinner		
Whether you're allowed to fail a class		
What you do on a Saturday		

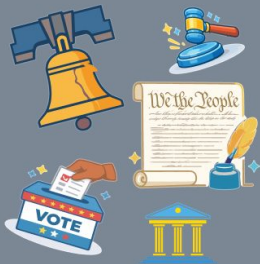


Some of those were easy. Bedtime is family. Your math test is school. Nobody argues about those, because each one clearly belongs to somebody. But a few probably showed up on both of your lists.

Take screen time. Your school decides when devices come out during the day, what you're allowed to open on a school computer, and whether your homework is on a screen at all. Your family decides what happens with screens at home — how long, when, and what's off limits. Both of them have real power over the same thing. They just control different parts of your day.

Or failing a class. Your school decides what your grade is. Your family decides what happens when you bring it home. Neither one can do the other's job. That's not confusion. That's two different authorities, each with real power, sharing the same space.

Name one thing from the list that both your family and your school have a say in. Explain how each one has power over it.



How Laws Are Made

(And Why You Should Care)

Jump In Shared Power

Most days, family and school stay out of each other's way. But not always.

Here's the situation. Your family plans a trip. It's a big one — a wedding, or a grandparent you almost never see. It falls on a Tuesday and a Wednesday, which means missing two days of school.

Your school's attendance policy says unexcused absences count against you.

Your family says you're going.

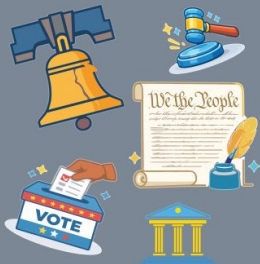
On a scale from 1-5, Who should decide? *(hint: there is no right answer, but you need to be able to explain your choice)*



You rated the power of the family, the school, or both in this situation. **Why did you rate it that way? Explain your thinking in 2–3 sentences.**

Some things worth considering:

- Which one has more authority over where you are on a Tuesday?
- Does it matter which one is closer to you?
- Is there a way both could be right?



How Laws Are Made

(And Why You Should Care)

Jump In Shared Power

There's no clean answer — and that's the point.

You may have said the family decides, because they're your family. You may have said the school, because attendance is their rule. You may have landed in the middle. All of those are reasonable. **Here's what actually happens: your family can take you. But the school still counts the absence, unless the school agrees to excuse it. Both keep their power. Neither one cancels the other.**

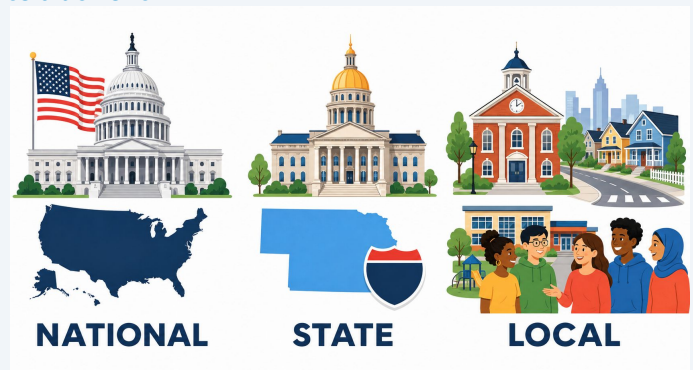
And notice something else — the school isn't at the top either. Your teachers follow rules the school didn't write: attendance requirements, testing schedules, how many days the school year has to be. Those come from the district and the state. Your principal can't just ignore them.

So it isn't two layers. It's more like four:

you – your family – your school – the district and state above it

Governments work the same way. The United States has a national government, fifty state governments, and thousands of local governments. Each has real power. Each is limited by the others. And when they disagree, it isn't about a Tuesday off school it's about who gets emergency help after a disaster, who decides what's taught in your classroom, and whether a whole community gets heard at all.

This system has a name: **federalism**. It decides more about your life than you'd guess.



Predict

One prediction before you start: When more than one government shares power over the same problem, does that make things better or worse for regular people? Explain in 2–3 sentences. *There's no right answer yet. You'll come back to this at the end of the chapter.*

Shared Power

Case Study Challenge

Who decides? Who gets heard? Who gets left out?

Name: _____ Class: _____

Directions

Federalism decides more than laws. It decides **who gets help, who gets heard, and who has the power to act.**

Sometimes shared power helps a community. Other times it creates confusion, delays, or leaves people out entirely.

Your Mission

- Part 1 — Read all four case studies, then choose ONE to analyze.
- Part 2 — Pick an issue you care about and take action on it yourself.

Keep this question in mind the whole time:

Does sharing power create fairness — or can it leave people without equal voice or support?

In the Jump In, you made a prediction about this. You will come back to it at the end.

CASE STUDY #1

Mari Copeny and the Flint Water Crisis

In 2014, the city of Flint, Michigan switched its drinking water to the Flint River. The water was never treated properly, and lead leached out of the old pipes and into people's homes.

Here is the part that makes this a federalism story: Flint's finances had been taken over by the state, so the decision to switch water sources was made by a manager the governor appointed — not by anyone Flint residents elected.

Residents complained for months. State officials told them the water was safe. It was not.

In 2016, an 8-year-old named Mari Copeny wrote a letter to President Obama asking him to pay attention to her city. He wrote back, visited Flint, and the federal government approved money to replace the pipes.

Three levels, one problem: a city run by a state appointee, a state agency that said the water was fine, and a federal government that acted only after a child wrote a letter.



CASE STUDY #2

March for Our Lives and Gun Violence Prevention

After the 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, student survivors formed March for Our Lives. They began with local marches and school walkouts, then pressured their state government.

It worked at the state level. Florida passed a law raising the minimum age to buy certain firearms.

The activists then pushed for federal legislation, arguing that gun violence crosses state lines and needs a national solution.

Others disagreed — not necessarily about the goal, but about who should decide. They argued that conditions differ across the country and that a rule fitting one state may not fit another, which is exactly why the Constitution left many powers to the states.

Notice what the argument was really about: not just what the law should say, but which level of government should get to say it.

CASE STUDY #3

Youth Justice Coalition and Youth Incarceration

The Youth Justice Coalition is a youth-led organization in Los Angeles made up of young people who have been directly affected by incarceration, probation, and policing. Their goal is to reduce youth incarceration and invest instead in schools, mental health care, and job programs.

They focus on state and local government, because that is where the jurisdiction is:

- States write juvenile justice laws
- Counties run detention centers
- Local prosecutors and police decide who gets arrested and charged

They also push for federal action, because national laws shape funding, civil rights protections, and sentencing — including whether money flows toward incarceration or toward schools.

Youth incarceration is not just a local issue. It is tied to state law, county budgets, and federal funding all at once.

CASE STUDY #4

Free School Meals in Minnesota

Try learning while you are hungry. For a lot of students, that is not a thought experiment — including kids whose families earned just enough to miss qualifying for free lunch, but not enough to afford it.

In Minnesota, students spoke at school board meetings. Parents contacted lawmakers. Educators argued that food is a condition for learning, not a reward for it.

Because states control most education policy, Minnesota lawmakers had the jurisdiction to act. In 2023, they passed a law guaranteeing free breakfast and lunch to every public school student, regardless of family income.

Federal programs still help pay for school meals. Minnesota chose to go further than federal law required.

Remember the Supremacy Clause: a state cannot contradict federal law, but it can always go further than federal law goes.

Part 1: Analyze Your Case Study

Choose ONE case study. Use evidence from the reading and the video.

Case study I chose:

1. Which level(s) of government are involved? (check all that apply)

☐ Local ☐ State ☐ National (federal)

2. Who is most affected by this issue? Be specific.

3. How did sharing power help this situation — or make it harder?

4. Who benefited from the decisions that were made, and who ran into barriers?

Part 2: Whose Job Is It?

Now pick something you would change, and find the person who could actually change it.

- 1 What would you change about your school, your neighborhood, or your town? Small and specific is better than big and vague.
- 2 Who has jurisdiction? Ask: how far does this problem reach, and who already makes rules about it?
- 3 Get specific. "The government" is not an address. Name an actual office.

My issue:	
Level of Government to contact:	Office / person:

Maya wanted a crosswalk outside her school. She almost wrote to her U.S. senator — then realized a senator works on national issues and cannot fix one intersection. Streets are a city job. She contacted her city council member instead.

Almost everyone guesses wrong the first time. The skill is checking before you send.



Part 2: Make Your Case

Choose *ONE* — write a letter, or write a call script.

OPTION A — The Letter

Dear _____,

My name is _____ and I am a student at _____.

I am writing to you about _____.

This matters because _____.

I am asking you to _____.

I am writing to you specifically because _____.

OPTION B — The Call Script

"Hi, my name is _____ and I live in _____."

"I am calling about _____."

My concern, in two sentences: _____.

"I would like _____ to _____."

Why it matters to me: _____.

"Thank you for passing this along."

Before you turn it in, check:

- ☐ I named a specific office, not "the government" ☐ I explained why that level has jurisdiction
- ☐ I made a specific ask ☐ A stranger could understand what I want

Scoring Rubric

9 points total

Criteria	Federalism Investigator — 3	Civic Analyzer — 2	Emerging Researcher — 1
Understanding Federalism	Names the correct level(s) and explains clearly why each one has jurisdiction over this issue.	Names levels, but the explanation of why is thin. Next step: say how far the problem reaches.	Levels are missing or wrong. Next step: ask who already makes rules about this.
Impact & Fairness	Explains who is most affected and who faced barriers, using specific evidence from the case study.	Identifies who is affected, but stays general. Next step: name a specific group and a specific barrier.	Little analysis of impact. Next step: reread who the decision landed on.
Taking Action	Identifies a specific office with the authority to act, and makes a clear, doable ask with a reason attached.	Identifies a level or general office; the ask needs sharpening. Next step: name exactly what you want done.	Office or ask is unclear. Next step: finish "I am asking you to ____."

8–9 Federalism Investigator • 5–7 Civic Analyzer • 3–4 Emerging Researcher