

Who Represents you in Trenton?



New Jersey State Assembly Chamber, Trenton, NJ

Lesson Creator: New Jersey Center for Civic Education, Rutgers University, Piscataway, NJ

Grade Level: 3-5

New Jersey Core Content Social Studies Standards

- 6.1.5.CivicsPI.1: Describe ways in which people benefit from and are challenged by working together, including through government, workplaces, voluntary organizations, and families.
- 6.1.5.CivicsPI.3: Explain how the United States functions as a representative democracy and describe the roles of elected representatives and how they interact with citizens at local, state, and national levels.
- 6.1.5.CivicsPI.4: Describe the services our government provides the people in the community, state and across the United States.
- 6.1.5.CivicsPI.5: Explain how government functions at the local, county, and state level.
- 6.1.5.CivicsPD.1: Describe the roles of elected representatives and explain how individuals at local, state, and national levels can interact with them.
- 6.1.5.CivicsPD.2: Explain how individuals can initiate and/or influence local, state, or national public policymaking (e.g., petitions, proposing laws, contacting elected officials).
- 6.1.5.CivicsPR.1: Compare procedures for making decisions in a variety of settings including classroom, school, government, and /or society.
- 6.1.5.CivicsPR.4: Explain how policies are developed to address public problems.
- 6.1.5.EconET.1: Identify positive and negative incentives that influence the decisions people make.

Common Core ELA Standards

- RI.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what a text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- RI.5.4 Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text
- W.5.2 Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic. Use facts and definition to develop points and provide a concluding statement
- W.5.7 Participate in shared research and writing projects
- W.5.8 Gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

- SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly
- SL.5.2 Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media

Objectives: Student will be able to

- Explain what legislatures do
- Compare and contrast legislative and executive functions
- Explain how a bill becomes a law
- Identify the requirements for being a member of the New Jersey State legislature
- Identify their State Legislative District and their representatives in the State Legislature
- Describe how individuals can influence public policy and develop an action plan to have a piece of legislation become law

Essential Questions/Focus Questions

- What does the New Jersey State Legislatures do?
- How does a bill become a law?
- How can individuals influence public policy?

What does the Legislature do?

The legislature is the branch of government that makes new laws and changes old ones. The New Jersey State Legislature consists of two Houses: a 40-member Senate and an 80-member General Assembly. The Senate and Assembly chambers are located in the State House in Trenton.

The New Jersey Legislature has the power to enact laws by a majority vote of both houses, subject to a veto by the governor. A veto may be overridden by the Legislature if there is a two-thirds majority vote in each House to override the governor's veto.

The New Jersey State Legislature makes laws only for the state of New Jersey, while the U.S. Congress creates laws for all fifty states.

Activity 1: Find the definition for "legislate" in a dictionary or online. *To "legislate" is "to make or enact laws" or "to put in force or cause to be by legal authority.* Compare the authority to "legislate" with the authority held by the president and the governor as the chief executive to execute or carry out the laws. How are the roles different? How and why must the executive (the governor) and the legislature work together?

What are the requirements to be a member of the New Jersey Legislature?

A State Senator must be at least 30 years old, and must have lived in New Jersey for at least four years.

A member of the General Assembly must be at least 21 years old and must have lived in the state for at least two years.

All legislators must live in the legislative districts they represent for at least one year before the election.

While legislators spend a considerable amount of their time on legislative matters, service in the Legislature is considered to be part-time, and most legislators also hold other employment.

The voters in each district elect one Senator and two members of the General Assembly. Legislative elections are held in November of each odd-numbered year. Members of the Assembly serve two-year terms. Senators serve four-year terms.

Activity 2: Find the provisions in the New Jersey State Constitution that provide the authority for the Legislature and describe the requirements to be a member of the New Jersey State Legislature. Complete the chart, Handout I.

A completed chart: **Where does the Legislature get its authority?**

Separation of powers into executive, legislative and judicial	Art. III, Sec. 1	The powers of the government shall be divided among three distinct branches, the legislative, executive, and judicial. No person or persons belonging to or constituting one branch shall exercise any of the powers properly belonging to either of the others, except as expressly provided in this Constitution.
Legislative powers in the Senate and General Assembly	Art IV, Sec. 1, para. 1	The legislative power shall be vested in a Senate and General Assembly.
Requirements to be a member of the State Senate	Art IV, Sec. 1, para. 2	No person shall be a member of the Senate who shall not have attained the age of thirty years, and have been a citizen and resident of the State for four years, and of the district for which he shall be elected one year, next before his election.
Requirements to be a member of the General Assembly	Art IV, Sec. 1, para. 2	No person shall be a member of the General Assembly who shall not have attained the age of twenty-one years and have been a citizen and resident of the State for two years, and of the district for which he shall be elected one year, next before his election.

Composition of the Senate	Art. IV, Sec. 2, para. 1	The Senate shall be composed of forty senators
Composition of the General Assembly	Art. IV, Sec. 2, para. 3	The General Assembly shall be composed of eighty members.
How a bill becomes a law	Art. IV, Sec. 4, para. 6	No bill or joint resolution shall pass, unless there shall be a majority of all the members of each body personally present and agreeing thereto,
Overriding a veto by the governor	Art. V, Sec. 1, para. 14	(a) When a bill has finally passed both houses, the house in which final action was taken to complete its passage shall cause it to be presented to the Governor before the close of the calendar day next following the date of the session at which such final action was taken. (b) A passed bill presented to the Governor shall become law: (1) if the Governor approves and signs it within the period allowed for his consideration; or, (2) if the Governor does not return it to the house of origin, with a statement of his objections, before the expiration of the period allowed for his consideration; or, (3) if, upon reconsideration of a bill objected to by the Governor, two-thirds of all the members of each house agree to pass the bill.

How are the legislative districts determined?

New Jersey is divided into 40 legislative districts (See Handout 2: New Jersey Legislative Districts). The people of each district elect one Senator and two General Assembly members. Each district has about the same number of people in it, so each legislator represents about the same number of people.

New boundary lines for the districts are drawn every ten years after an official count or census has been taken of the people and where they live. The shapes of the districts may be changed to show changes in the population. City districts are usually small because more people live in a small area. Suburban and rural legislative districts may be very large, which shows that the people live farther apart.

Until 1966, State Senators had been elected on a county basis, even though this had resulted in much greater representation for more rural counties than the urbanized counties. Following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Reynolds v. Simms* (1964), a constitutional convention in New Jersey amended the State Constitution to meet the requirement of "one person, one vote" by requiring members of the State Senate as well as members of the General Assembly to be elected from legislative districts with similar populations.

Activity 3: Go to the Municipalities Index at <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/districts/municipalities.asp> and find your legislative district.

Who represents you in the New Jersey Legislature?

Activity 4: Go to the district map of the New Jersey legislature at <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/districts/njmap210.html> and click on your district number to find out who represents you in Trenton.

How does a bill become a law in New Jersey?

Activity 5: Go to <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/legprocess.asp> and/or [2017Insidepage_LegProcside2.qxd \(njstatehousetours.org\)](http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/legprocess.asp) to review the process for a bill becoming a law in New Jersey. Students compare the process of how a bill becomes a law in New Jersey with the process at the national level (which is very similar) and draw a diagram demonstrating how a bill becomes a law.

How can you influence the developments of laws in New Jersey?

Activity 6: Students select a bill currently before the New Jersey Legislature or identify an issue that they would like the New Jersey legislature to address and hold a mock legislative hearing and/or a mock legislative debate about the issue.

Legislative Hearings are held by committees of the U.S. Congress, the New Jersey State Legislature and other legislative bodies to gather information from witnesses testifying about issues of public concern. Role-playing a legislative hearing gives students an opportunity to better understand the purpose and procedures of such hearing as well as the role of committee members. It also helps students to gain experience in clarifying information, interests and values associated with the subject being discussed. See Handout 3 for directions on conducting a mock legislative hearing.

Legislative Debates are what happens on the floor of the U.S. Congress, the New Jersey State Legislature or other legislative bodies as they discuss and make a decision about legislation. Roleplaying a mock legislative debate enables students to understand the process of making laws. See Handout 4 for directions on conducting a mock legislative debate.

Invite one of your members of the New Jersey legislature to visit your class.

Assessment

Write a short essay comparing the process of making change at the state and national levels and the impact of the policy decisions made at each level.

Extension:

Go to https://njstatehousetours.org/tour/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Actbook_English.pdf for a variety of activities and games for kids in the New Jersey State House Activity book.

Visit the State House and take a State House tour with the Office of Legislative Services. Trained staff and volunteers provide tours and programs that match school curriculum and bring the lessons of the classroom to life in our State's capitol. For additional information go to http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/visiting_teacher_guide.asp. To schedule a visit or ask a question, call the Tour Office at 609-847-3150. Eagleton Institute offers **State House Express** awards of up to \$500 to eligible teachers to help pay for bus rental costs to take classes on field trips to the State House in Trenton for special guided tours and first-hand examination of the legislature's role on our system of representative democracy. Visit <https://cyp.rutgers.edu/for-educators/state-house-express/> for application details and teacher resources.

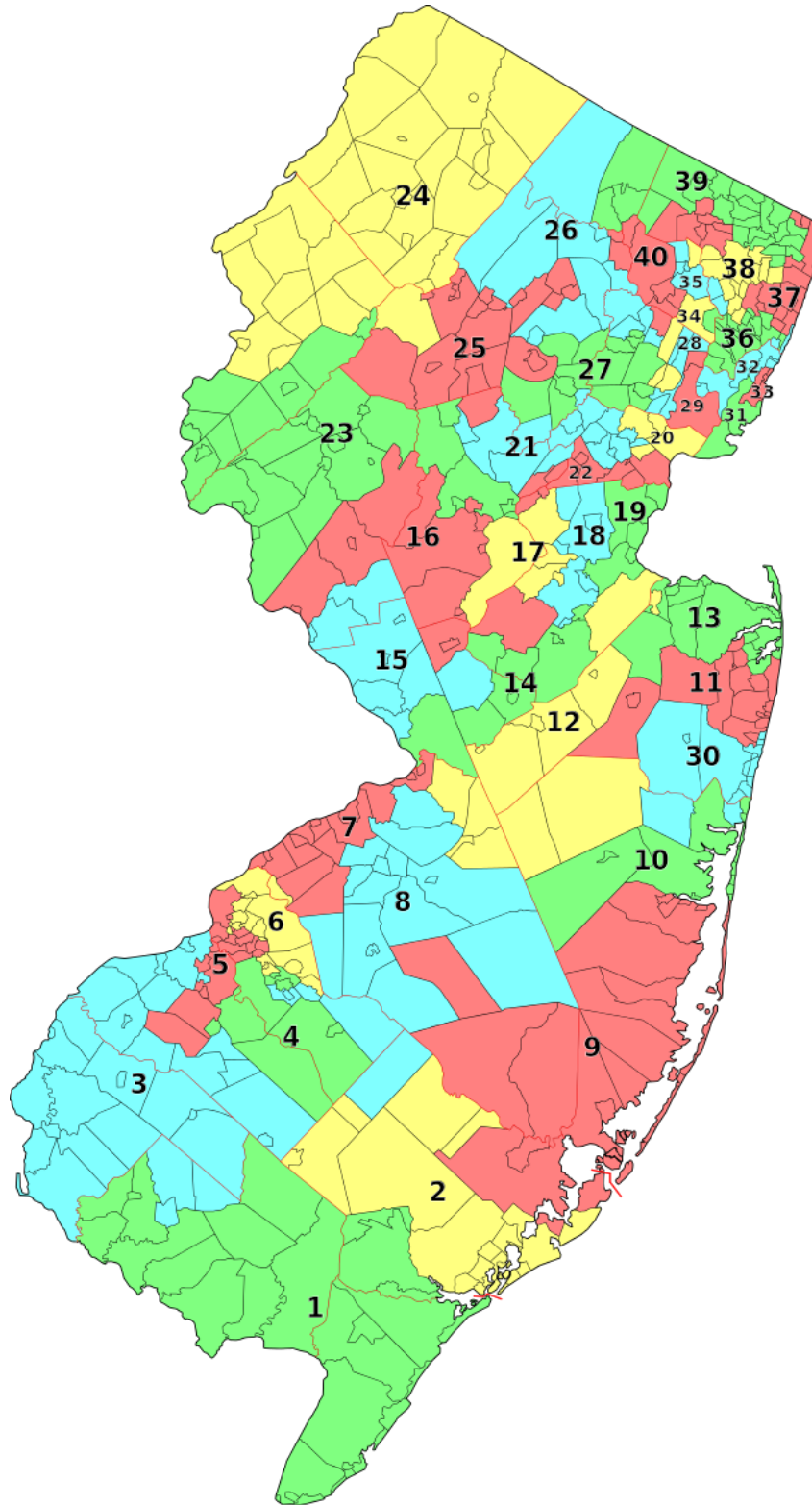
Handout 1

Where does the Legislature gets its authority?

Separation of powers into executive, legislative and judicial	Art. III, Sec. 1	
Legislative powers in the Senate and General Assembly	Art IV, Sec. 1, para. 1	
Requirements to be a member of the State Senate	Art IV, Sec. 1, para. 2	
Requirements to be a member of the General Assembly	Art IV, Sec. 1, para. 2	
Composition of the Senate	Art. IV, Sec. 2, para. 1	
Composition of the General Assembly	Art. IV, Sec. 2, para. 3	
How a bill becomes a law	Art. IV, Sec. 4, para. 6	
Overriding a veto by the governor	Art. V, Sec. 1, para. 14	

Handout 2

New Jersey Legislative Districts (2011)



Handout 3

Mock Legislative Hearings

1. **Clarify topics.** Help students understand the topic of the legislative hearing. The topics are clearly identified in the lessons in the student text and in this edition. You also will want to ensure that student's understand the role of committees in the legislative process.
2. **Contact resource person.** Invite a local legislator, representative of local groups or chapters of a national organization to serve as resource people on the topic of the hearing.
3. **Assign Roles.** Explain to participants the purpose of a legislative hearing and assign the appropriate roles:
 - a. **Legislators.** Six legislators in a practical number for a committee, but the number may vary according to class needs. Designate one legislator as the chairperson to preside over the hearing.
 - b. **Witnesses.** The number and nature of the witnesses depend o the topic being discussed. The specific roles described in the lessons and in this edition are designed to present differing points of view on the topic.
 - c. **Recorder.** This role is optional. This person will keep a record of the proceedings and present a review or summary of any recommendations that may emerge during the discussions.
 - d. **Newspaper reporters.** This role is optional. But is useful in helping students gain insights on the function of the press in the democratic process. Select student's to represent newspaper with varying perspectives. Ask them to interview legislators and witnesses, to observe the proceedings, and to write brief articles or editorials about the topic. They should share and discuss their work with the class.
4. **Prepare presentations. Prepare presentations.** Allow time for participants to prepare for the legislative hearing in accordance with their assigned roles.
 - a. Legislators should identify the key issue(s) and prepare questions to ask each witness.
 - b. Witnesses should define their position on the issue(s), prepare an opening statement, anticipate question from the legislators, and formulate possible responses
 - c. Witnesses may wish to discuss similarities in positions with other witnesses.
 - d. When appropriate, have a resource person work with the student or allow students to contact outside resources for assistance in preparing their position on an issue.
5. **Arrange the classroom.** Set up the classroom to resemble a legislative chamber. Include a table for the legislators, a desk for the recorder, and a desk or table for the witnesses. Provide a gavel and name plates with the students' names and their roles. You may want to arrange the use of a hearing or committee room of a local legislative body.

6. Conduct the hearing. The following procedures should be used to conduct this activity:

- a. The committee chairpersons call the hearing to order; announces the purpose of the hearing and the order in which the witnesses will be called to testify.
- b. The chairperson calls each witness. The witness makes an opening statement. Followed by questions from members of the committee. You may want to establish time limits, usually three to four minutes for openings and five to six minutes for question from the legislators. Appoint a timekeeper to enforce time limitations.
- c. The chairperson is the first to question the witness, followed by the other members of the committee. A committee member may interrupt to ask a question or make a comment any time during the proceedings.
- d. After the witnesses have been heard, the legislators review the testimony. Discuss the issue(s) and make recommendations on what their next step(s) will be.

7. Debrief the activity. Debriefing questions vary according to the topic. Begin by having the legislators announce their decision. Discuss the facts and arguments presented on the topic and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the positions taken. Ask students to evaluate their experience with the hearing process itself. Conclude the debriefing by having students discuss the effectiveness of this activity as a tool for learning, including how well they performed their role in it. If a resource person assisted with the activity, that person should be included in the concluding discussion.

Handout 4

Mock Legislative Debates

- 1. Clarify topics.** Help students understand the topic of the legislative debate. The topics are clearly identified in the lessons in the student text and in this edition. You also will want to ensure that student's understand the process whereby bills are enacted into law.
- 2. Contact resource persons.** Contact state and national legislators or their staff assistants to help serve as resource persons.
- 3. Assign roles.** Consider the entire class as the legislative body with a student or the teacher assuming the role of the presiding officer Legislators may then be assigned to groups representing various positons on the issue. Groups are clearly identified in the student text and in this edition. You also may want to assign a recorder responsible for tracking key points of discussion during the debate.
- 4. Prepare presentations.** Allow time for participants to prepare for the legislative hearing in accordance with their assigned roles.

Each group should select a spokesperson and a recorder and then proceed to follow the directions given in the lesson. Subtends should analyze and evaluate the issue before developing their positions. In some cases, they will be asked to offer amendments to the bills already given in the lesson. In others, they may write a proposed bill designed to alleviate problems raised by the issue.

As each group completes its amendment or proposed bill, the spokesperson reports to the presiding officer asking that the bill be placed on the agenda. Bills should be placed on the agenda in the order in which they are received. Students may wish to discuss any similarities in their proposed amendments or bills with other groups to predetermine whether they can unite behind a common proposal.

- 5. Arrange the classroom.** Set up the classroom to resemble a legislative chamber. Include a table for the legislators, a desk for the recorder, and a desk or table for the witnesses. Provide a gavel and name plates with the students' names and their roles. You may want to arrange the use of a hearing or committee room of a local legislative body.
- 6. Conduct the legislative debate.** Time limits for the various steps in legislative debates should be decided ahead of time. The presiding officer should be empowered to cut off

speakers when the time limit has been reached. Conduct the legislative debate using the following procedures:

- a. The presiding officer calls the legislature to order, indicates that all voters will be decided by a simple majority, announces the issue, and opens the debate.
- b. The first bill on the agenda is introduced by the group's spokesperson. The spokesperson stands, addresses the presiding officer, and describes the bill the group has written. After presenting the bill, the spokesperson may recognize two other members of the group who may make additional comments on the bill.
- c. The bill is discussed and debated by the legislature. Representatives from other groups may ask questions, offer criticisms, or suggest modifications.
- d. The steps above are repeated for any additional bills that might be introduced during the session.
- e. When the discussion and debate on all proposed bills is completed, legislators may move that one of the bills be voted on or that the session is recessed to enable the groups to consider the bills that have been presented. If the session is recessed, each group meets to decide upon a course of action. A group may decide to support one of the bills as presented, suggest amendments to one of the bills presented, or develop a compromise bill.
- f. When the session is reconvened, the presiding officer asks for a motion to vote on one of the bills as presented, for a motion to amend of the bills, or for the introduction of a compromise bill. If amendments or comprise bills are proposed, they are individually debated and voted upon.
- g. This process is repeated until a bill is passed or the time allotted for the sessions is up and the legislature is adjourned.

7. Debrief the activity. Debriefing questions vary according to the topic. Discuss the facts and arguments presented on the topic and evaluate the strengths and weakness of the positions taken. Also ask students to evaluate their experience with the legislative process itself. Conclude the debriefing by having students discuss the effectiveness of the activity as a tool for learning, including how well they performed their role in it. If a resource person assisted with the activity, that person should be included in the concluding discussion.