

Maggie's Civics Corner

Lesson #17 – Legislative Branch



Maggie says ...

In these difficult times, as our nation and the world pull together, it is more important than ever to understand our role as a citizen.

Constitution Close-Up: The Constitution says the United States Government must have three branches: Legislative, Executive, and Judicial. Each branch has its own responsibilities, but sometimes they work together to check each other's work. Let's take a look at each one!

Today's lesson is about the LEGISLATIVE BRANCH. Article I of the Constitution establishes the Legislative Branch of our government. It is also called Congress. Congress is made up of two parts: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives has 435 members, and each state gets a certain number of Representatives depending on how many people live there. The Senate, on the other hand, has 100 members – two from each state.

MAKING A LAW: Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have a role in creating laws. Potential laws (called "bills") are first studied by a Committee. The Committee can choose to edit, throw away, or accept the bill. If the Committee accepts it, the bill goes to the full House of Representatives for a vote. If it receives a majority of votes (218 out of 435 members), then the bill moves over to the Senate where a similar procedure occurs – a Committee studies the bill and if it accepts it, the bill moves to the full Senate for a vote, where a majority vote is 51 out of 100 senators. For the bill to become law, the President must sign it. But the President also has the power to veto the bill, which means to reject it. If that happens, the bill returns to the House of Representatives and the Senate, where he must get 2/3 its membership to vote to override the veto and pass the bill into law. In the House, that means 290 members must vote for it, while in the Senate 67 senators must be in favor of it.

Pretty complicated, huh? The point is to make sure all our country's laws have been studied and debated thoroughly before being passed. The most important thing to remember is that Congress AND the President each have important roles in forging the laws of our country.

OTHER POWERS: Congress handles our federal budget. It decides how much to tax citizens and how to spend the tax money collected. In 2019, Congress approved the spending of \$4.45 trillion. Congress also has the power to declare war, approve treaties, and more!

Activity: Imagine you're a member of the House of Representatives – because you could be one day! What is a law you think you would propose? For example, I would propose a bill establishing every June 1st as National Pet-a-Dog Day! Draft a bill about anything – education, healthcare, or anything else you care about – then see how many of your friends and family would vote for it.

Civics Resources: For more information about the Legislative Branch, check out this [History.com video](https://www.history.com/video).