

# **A Kid's Guide to Laws and Government: Step-by-Step Activities to Teach Children How Laws Are Made, How the President is Elected, the Structure of the U.S. Government, and More!**

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## **Acknowledgements**

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This is the first book in the series of Step-By-Step Activities for 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers. Available SOON in the series will be *Exploring Family History*, *Expanding Map Skills*, and *Biographies of People Who Have Made a Difference*.

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# **Unit Overview: A Kid's Guide to Laws and Government**

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**California History/Social Science Grade 2, Standard 1: Students explain the institutions and practices of governments in the United States ... in terms of:**

The difference between making laws, carrying out laws, determining if laws have been violated and punishing wrongdoers.

## **Historical and Social Science Analysis Skills: Research, Evidence, and Point of View**

1. Students differentiate between primary and secondary sources.
2. Students pose relevant questions about ... artifacts, photographs...
3. Students distinguish fact from fiction by comparing documentary sources on historical figures and events with fictionalized characters and events.

**Compelling Question:** How does the U.S. governments work?

## **Supporting Questions**

1. Who makes the laws, who enforces the laws, who punishes wrong-doers?
2. What are some of the duties of the President of the United States?
3. Who makes the laws for the United States government? How are the laws made?
4. Who determines if laws of the United States Government are fair?
5. In the United States Government, who makes the laws, who enforces the laws, who punishes the wrong-doers?

## **Description of the Topic**

This unit is designed to introduce students to the governmental institutions and practices in the United States. In Lesson 1, students discuss who makes the rules, who enforces the rules, and who punishes wrong-doers at home, in their classroom and at their school. The students are introduced to the branches of our government. In Lesson 2, students learn about the qualifications and duties of the U.S. President. A classroom election is held in which students nominate and elect a class president.

In Lesson 3, to simulate Congress in a representative democracy, a representative is elected by each cooperative learning group. Students then propose bills that are debated and voted upon by the Class Congress. In Lesson 4, the classroom president appoints Classroom Supreme Court judges who are then ratified (or not) by the Class Congress. The Judges determine if the bills voted on by the Classroom Congress are fair.

A series of "Mice" books by Peter W. Barnes and Cheryl Shaw Barnes help to introduce the story of our government. Information is acquired from the storybook characters and events. Informational storybooks are used to build bridges to expository topics that might otherwise be too complex for young children.

Many Grade 2 teachers work on this unit during February when the content correlates with President's Day. The unit may be taught at the beginning of the school year so the class congress can set the class rules, or it can be coordinated with a national election.

## **Common Core State Standards**

Many of the activities in this unit support and develop the Grade 2 Reading/Language Arts standards. The abbreviation for each standard is included in the unit. For example, RI.2.1 is for *Reading Standards for Informational Text, Grade 2, Standard 1* as written below.

### **Reading Standards for Informational Text**

RI.2.1 Ask and answer such questions as *who, what, where, when, why*, and *how* to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

RI.2.3 Describe the connection between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedure in a text.

RI.2.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 2 topic or subject area.

RI.2.7 Explain how specific images (e.g., a diagram showing how a machine works) contribute to and clarify the text.

RI.2.8 Describe how reasons support specific points the author makes in a text.

### **Reading Standards for Literature**

RL.2.1 Ask and answer such questions as *who, what, when, where, when why*, and *how* to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

RL.2.3 Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

RL.2.5 Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and ending concludes the action.

RL.2.7 Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

RL.2.9 Compare and contrast the important points presented by two texts on the same topic.

### **Language Standards**

L.2.1f Produce, expand, and rearrange complete simple and compound sentences

L.2.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

L.2.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words based on grade 2 reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.

### **Writing Standards**

W.2.2 Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.

W.2.5 With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.

### **Speaking and Listening Standards**

SL.2.1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

SL.2.3 Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

SL.2.5 Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

SL.2.6 Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification.

# Lesson 1: Who Makes the Laws, Who Enforces the Laws, Who Punishes Wrong-Doers?

## Materials needed for this lesson:

A copy for each student of the **Laws Chart (Handout #1.1, page 7)** and chart paper for recording students' responses; chart of **Branches of the United States Government**; large sheet of chart paper or butcher paper; photos of the White House, U.S. Capitol building, Supreme Court building, and elected officials; (Optional: pocket chart and blank word cards for new vocabulary words)

## Activity # 1 Laws Chart

### Step 1: Rules at Home

Explain to the students that in this unit we will be studying about laws. Laws are like rules. A *law* is a rule that citizens must follow. Display a copy of the **Laws Chart (Handout #1.1, page 7)**. Refer students to the column titled "Home." Ask the following questions:

- Who makes the laws in the home?
- Who enforces the laws?
- Who punishes wrong-doers? Who determines if the laws are fair?

Within their table groups, students have a collaborative conversation about rules at home (SL2.1). As students share, record their responses on a copy of the *Laws Chart*.

### Step 2: Rules in the Classroom

Continue by having collaborative groups discuss rules in the classroom. Who makes these rules? Who enforces them? Who punishes the wrong-doers? (SL2.1) Record student's ideas on the *Laws Chart*. Discuss similarities and differences.

### Step 3: Rules at School

Have collaborative groups discuss the rules at school. Who makes these rules? Who enforces them? Who punishes the wrong-doers? How can you help? (SL2.1) Record student's ideas on the *Laws Chart*. Discuss similarities and differences.

	Who makes the rules?	Who makes sure rules are followed?	Who decides if rules are fair?
At Home	mom, aunt, dad, grandma, me, uncle	dad, mom, brother or sister, cousin, grandma	dad, mom, tia, me
At School	principal, teachers, school district, Kids	teachers, Kids, principal, security guard, supervision aides	principal, teacher, parents

### Step 4: Laws Chart

Provide each student with a blank copy of the **Laws Chart (Handout #1.1)**. Students complete their own copy of the first three categories on the chart: Home, Classroom and School. (Note: The United States Government section will be completed later in the unit.)

## Activity # 2 Branches of the United States Government

### Step 1: Who Makes the Laws?

Explain to students that just like we have rules at home, in our classroom, and in our school, our country, the United States of America, has a set of rules called *laws*. Define a *government* as the group of citizens that run a community, state, or country. Explain to students that the government of the United States has a structure for deciding who makes the laws, who enforces the laws, and who punishes wrongdoers.

## Step 2: Branches of the United States Government

Create a **large chart** titled, *Branches of the United States Government* (see below). Have students practice orally saying each word multiple times. Discuss the purpose of each branch and the similarity to the words on the **Laws Chart** (Handout #1.1).

Branches of the United States Government		
EXECUTIVE BRANCH (enforces the laws)	LEGISLATIVE BRANCH (makes the laws)	JUDICIAL BRANCH (punishers wrong-doers and decides if laws are fair)

This chart will become a “word wall” in progress. Each time you learn a new word related to a branch of the government, add it to the chart (RI2.4). Practice reading these words each day throughout the unit.

As an option, write each new word on a vocabulary card and use a pocket chart so the activity can more easily be manipulative and students can practice placing the vocabulary cards under the correct branch of government.

## Step 3: Our Government: The Three Branches

Explain that the three branches of government are all equal, with no one branch being more important than the other. To make laws, all three branches have to agree. (In later grades, students will learn about our government’s system of checks and balances).

If available, read the informational book *Our Government: The Three Branches* by Shelly Buchanan to help students deepen their understanding of concepts about government and the three branches of government.

Share the specific illustrations and ask students to explain how they contribute to or clarify the text (RI2.7).

To demonstrate their understanding of key details in the text, ask students questions such as *who, what, where, when, why, and how* (RI2.1).

## Assessment

The assessment of this lesson is integrated with the instruction and occurs throughout the lesson. It is recommended that student work be assembled into a portfolio. Student products should provide evidence of attainment of the following:

- Complete the home, classroom and school sections of the **Laws Chart** – Who Makes the Laws, Who Enforces Laws, Who Punishes Wrong-Doers? (Handout #1.1)

**Laws Chart**

	Who Makes the Laws?	Who Enforces the Laws?	Who Punishes Wrong-doers?
Home			
Classroom			
School			
United States Government			

Name:

## Lesson 2: What Are the Duties of the President of the United States?

### Materials needed for this lesson:

- chart of **Branches of the United States Government (Handout 2.1, page 14)**
- copy for each student of the **Presidential Quiz (Handout #2.2, page 15)**
- copy for each student of the **Vocabulary Words for the Executive Branch (Handout #2.3, page 16)** and, if desired, vocabulary cards for the new vocabulary words.
- *Woodrow, the White House Mouse* written and illustrated by Peter W. Barnes and Cheryl Shaw Barnes
- Photos of the president, the white house, and the oval office (readily available online)

A recommended resource: *Citizens Rule: How We Elect a President* (video) available from Discovery Education Streaming Plus

### Activity # 1 Qualifications of a President

#### Step 1: The President

Ask students the name of the President of the United States. Write the full name of the president on the whiteboard. Display a photograph of the president.

Refer to the chart developed in Lesson 1, **Branches of the United States Government**. Explain to students that the president comes under the “Executive” branch of the United States Government. Write the word “president” under the Executive Branch. (Note: Later, students will write on their copy of the chart. For now, only the teacher writes on the large classroom version.) As an alternative, write the word “president” on a vocabulary card and place it under the “Executive” heading on a pocket chart.

Discuss the following questions:

- Where does the president live? Write the words “White House” under the Executive Branch and display a picture of the White House.
- Where does the president work? Write the words “Oval Office” under the Executive Branch and display a picture of the Oval Office.
- Who was the first president of the United States?

#### Step 2: Presidential Quiz

Post a “YES” sign on one side of the classroom and a “NO” sign on the opposite side.

As you read each statement on the **Presidential Quiz (Handout # 2.2, page 15)**, have students decide whether each statement is true (yes) or false (no) and walk to the wall with their answer. Do not discuss the answers. Later in the lesson, students will each complete a copy of the quiz. FYI: the answers are: 1. N, 2.Y, 3.N, 4.Y, 5.N, 6.Y, 7.N, 8.N, 9.Y.

Ask a variety of questions about the presidency to determine prior knowledge.

- How does a person become president?
- What does a president do?
- What types of qualities do you think a person should have in order to become the president?



Tell students that the president is elected every four years. The president is only allowed to serve two four-year terms. The *Constitution of the United States* is a plan that lists the duties or jobs of the president. (Note: A constitution is a system of laws that prescribe the functions and limitations of the government).

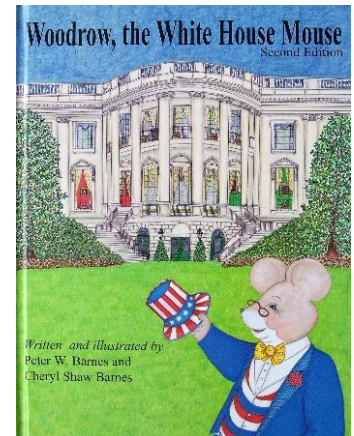
Explain that the president is elected by the citizens of the United States. To be elected, a president must meet the following **qualifications**:

- at least 35 years old
- a natural born citizen of the United States
- a resident within the United States for at least fourteen years

## **Activity # 2 Woodrow, the White House Mouse**

Read the book, *Woodrow, the White House Mouse* written and illustrated by Peter W. Barnes and Cheryl Shaw Barnes. Explain to students that it is a fictional or “make-believe” storybook that tells about a mouse who is president. Although it is a make-believe story, we can learn about the real duties of a United States President.

On the first reading of the book, concentrate on the text and the illustrations. After reading the story, help students analyze the illustrations to demonstrate an understanding of the characters, setting, and plot (RL2.7). Determine which parts of the illustrations might be factual and which might be fictional.



Have students describe the overall structure of the story, including how the beginning introduced the story and the ending concluded the action (RL2.5). How did the characters in the story respond to the major events and challenges in the story (RL2.3)?

After a second reading of *Woodrow, the White House Mouse*, ask questions such as *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *when*, *why* and *how* for students to demonstrate an understanding of key details in the text (RL2.1).

Using content from the story have students answer the following questions:

- What are different titles used for the president? (Chief Executive, Commander-in-Chief, and Head of State)
- What are the President's duties?
- Who can run for President?
- How long does the job last?

Additional questions include:

- Would you classify this book as fiction or non-fiction? Why?
- Why do you think the authors chose mice as the main characters of this story?
- What do you think was the most important information in this book?
- What do you think was the author's primary purpose for writing this book?
- What else would you like to know about the President and the White House that the book did not tell you?

## Activity # 3 Vocabulary Words for the Executive Branch

### Step 1: Create a Word Bank

Review *Woodrow, the White House Mouse* to create a word bank for key content-specific vocabulary and definitions related to the president and presidential duties (RI2.4). These words include *president*, *White House*, *inauguration* (text uses Inaugural Ball), *Oval Office*, *veto*, *Chief Executive*, *Commander-in-Chief*, and *Head of State*. Write these words on the existing chart under the “Executive” heading, or on vocabulary cards for the pocket chart.

### Step 2: Vocabulary Words for the Executive Branch

Refer to Handout #2.3 for a set of vocabulary cards related to the Executive Branch. Have students write the words under the “Executive Branch” section of Handout #2.1. (Note: Later, in Lesson 5, these words will be mixed with other vocabulary cards and students will be asked to sort the words according to the three Branches of Government.)

### Step 3: Review photographs of the White House and the President of the United States

To judge their accuracy, have students compare the illustrations in the *Woodrow, the White House Mouse* with the primary source photographs (RI2.7 and RL2.7).

Begin a bulletin board or a scrapbook to display news articles about the president. Collect non-fiction books about different presidents for the classroom library.

It is helpful to also have a photo of the presidential seal and a copy of the Presidential Oath of office. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/kids/>.

This is a good time to read a biography of Abraham Lincoln (listed in Standard 2.5) or of other U.S. Presidents.

### Step 4: A Return to the Presidential Quiz

Return to Handout #2.2 completed in Activity #1. Provide each student with a copy of the Presidential Quiz and have them complete a copy of the quiz.

## Activity # 4 Citizens Rule: How We Elect a President

If available, view the video *Citizens Rule: How We Elect a President* from Discovery Education Streaming Plus. After watching the video, discuss what information students already knew and what information was new.

## Activity #5 Elect a Class President

Note: You may wish to save the class election until the end of the unit. After completing Lesson 5, establish class jobs that fit under each branch of government so that every child will have some type of role in your “class government.”

You may wish to invite parents to come and watch as you hold an inauguration ceremony for the class president and when each student’s role in your class government is announced.

### Step 1: Election Artifacts

Share artifacts (realia) depicting the election process, such as campaign literature, buttons and posters. Encourage students to go on a scavenger hunt to locate election realia such as: an advertisement or newspaper article discussing a candidate's qualifications; a bumper sticker, sign, button, hat, or similar memorabilia promoting an individual's candidacy; campaign literature from a candidate urging an individual to vote for him/her or provide financial support; an editorial or a cartoon; the signature of a candidate.



### Step 2: Qualifications to Become President

Ask students what qualifications they think a president of their class should have. Sample qualifications are

- a second grade student
- resident of room \_\_\_\_ for at least one month
- at least 6 years old

Brainstorm a list of **qualities** of a good leader. These may include:

- honest
- smart
- hardworking
- responsible
- follows classroom rules

(Note: Check your report card for other qualities that might be included. You might create a circle map listing the qualities. Keep it available for students to refer to throughout the unit.)

### Step 3: Duties of the President

Create a list of duties for your Class President. Have students organize information into a T-chart to compare your Class President with those of the President of the United States.

Our Class President

President of the United States

Name:

Residence:

Qualifications:

Duties:

Ask students questions to help them interpret information on the T-chart. Compare and contrast the qualifications and duties of the Class President and the U.S. President.

### Step 4: Nominations

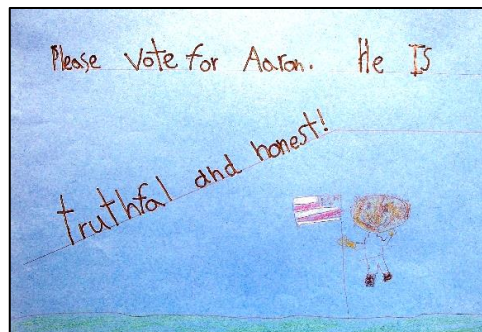
To simulate a primary election, explain that any student who meets the qualifications may run for Class President. Ask who would like to be a candidate. Type up a ballot with all interested names and have the students vote (primary election). Select the top three to be the final candidates.

### Step 5: The Campaign

Candidates may select a campaign manager and make posters urging students to vote for him or her. Each of the presidential candidates prepares a campaign speech telling why he/she wants the job, his/her qualifications, and why he/she will make a good class president.

If desired, provide sentence frames to assist with speech preparation:

- My name is \_\_\_\_\_
- I am running for Class President.
- I think I will make a good Class President because.....



Discuss the qualities of a good campaign speech:

- maintain a clear focus
- speak clearly at an understandable pace
- be convincing

### Step 6: Campaign Speeches

Explain to the students that they should listen to the speeches to make a decision about which candidate will get their vote. Provide an opportunity for students to ask and answer questions about what each speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen their understanding of the candidate (SL2.3).

### Step 7: Class Election

Conduct an election for the Class President. If possible, provide an area in the classroom with voting booths (study carrels). In advance, prepare a ballot listing the full name of each candidate. Discuss how to mark the ballot accurately with an "X." Candidates' names may be identified with different colors or photographs so that nonreaders will be able to use the color or photograph to identify the appropriate box to mark.

Students should register (sign-in) at the polling place. Provide a class list and designate a place for students to sign in beside their name. Students then enter the voting booth and "secretly" vote for the candidate of their choice. If desired, provide students with stickers to show that they have voted.

At the designated closing time, have two students open the ballot box and read the ballots. Have a third student record the votes on a tally sheet. Have two "poll watchers" observe to see that the votes are counted and recorded correctly. After the votes are counted, the recorder and the poll watchers sign the sheet verifying the correct record of the vote.

Discuss questions about the election such as "Do you have to tell who you vote for or can you keep it a secret?" "Why might some persons want to tell and others keep it a secret?"

### Step 8: Inauguration

Plan an inauguration ceremony for the new Class President. Include a swearing in ceremony and an oath of office. If possible, accompany the swearing in ceremony with the music *Hail to the Chief*, available at [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

## Assessment

The assessment of this lesson is integrated with the instruction and occurs throughout the lesson. Student products should provide evidence of attainment of the following:

- Write the **Vocabulary Words for the Executive Branch of the United States Government** (Handout #2.3) onto the proper category on **The Branches of the United States Government** (Handout #2.1)
- Complete the **Presidential Quiz** (Handout #2.2)
- Participate in a class election

## Optional Activity: Interview a Family Member

Suggest that students interview older family members about their experiences of voting and the kinds of things for which they have voted. If possible, have students accompany family members to the polls for a firsthand look at the process.

## Optional Activity: Presidential Seal

Students design a class presidential seal.

## Optional Activity: Presidential Biographies

This is a good time to read biographies of presidents. Students are very interested in learning about the various presidents. Also popular with students is a box of U.S. President flashcards.



Display in the classroom of Edna Byers, Palm Springs Unified School District

Branches of the United States Government		
Executive Branch	Legislative Branch	Judicial Branch



## Presidential Quiz

*How much do you know about being the President of the United States?  
Decide if the following statements are "True" (yes) or "False" (no).*

	Yes	No
1.The President must be a man.	_____	_____
2.The President must be at least 35 years old.	_____	_____
3.The President must be married.	_____	_____
4.Only a person who is a citizen at birth can be elected President of the United States.	_____	_____
5.The President must have military experience.	_____	_____
6.A person can be elected President only twice.	_____	_____
7.The President must earn more money than anyone else in the country.	_____	_____
8.The President must be a lawyer.	_____	_____
9.The President must obey the law, just like everyone else.	_____	_____

Name\_\_\_\_\_

The source for this quiz is unknown. Please contact me at prisporter@aol.com if you know the original source so the proper credit can be given.

## Vocabulary Words for the Executive Branch

**President**

**veto**

**White House**

**Chief Executive**

**inauguration**

**Head of State**

**Oval Office**

**Commander-in-Chief**



## Lesson 3: Who Makes the Laws for the United States Government? How Are They Made?

### Materials needed for this lesson:

- Large chart of **Branches of the United States Government** (described on page 6) and the student copies begun during Lesson 2 (**Handout #2.1, page 14**).
- *House Mouse, Senate Mouse*, written and illustrated by Peter W. and Cheryl Barnes
- Copies for each student of the **Vocabulary Words for the Legislative Branch (Handout #3.1, page 21)**, and, if desired, vocabulary cards for each new vocabulary word.

### Activity # 1 Who Makes the Laws?

#### Step 1: Review the Laws Chart (Handout # 1.1)

Discuss who makes the laws for home, the classroom, and the school. Ask students if they know who makes the laws for the United States government? Explain that laws are made by “representatives” of the people, not by the people directly.

#### Step 2: Branches of the United States Government

Introduce the Legislative Branch and the vocabulary words for *Congress*, the *Senate* and the *House* (RI2.4). To the large chart, **Branches of the United States Government**, add each new vocabulary word, or add the new vocabulary cards to the pocket chart.

Explain that the laws are made by the Senators in the Senate and by the Representatives in the House of Representatives. The leader of the Senate is called the **Majority Leader** and the leader of the House is called the **Speaker of the House**. Add vocabulary cards for each word to the chart or pocket chart.

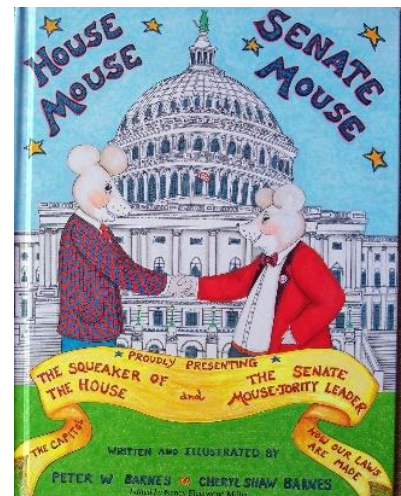
### Activity # 2 *House Mouse, Senate Mouse*

Read the book *House Mouse, Senate Mouse*, written and illustrated by Peter W. Barnes and Cheryl Shaw Barnes. On the first reading of the book, concentrate on the text and the illustrations. Analyze the illustrations for the information they reveal (RI2.7).

After reading the story, help students analyze the illustrations to demonstrate an understanding of the characters, setting, and plot (RL2.7). Determine which parts of the illustrations might be factual and which might be fictional.

Have students describe the overall structure of the story, including how the beginning introduced the story and the ending concluded the action (RL2.5). How did the characters in the story respond to the major events and challenges in the story (RL2.3)?

After a second reading of *House Mouse, Senate Mouse*, ask questions such as *who, what, when, where, when, why and how* for students to demonstrate an understanding of key details in the text (RL2.1).



Using content from the story have students answer the following questions:

- What are the jobs of the lawmakers in Congress? (make laws)
- Where do senators and representatives work? (Capitol Hill)
- How long do they serve in the House? In the Senate?
- What bill did Miss Tuftmouse's students propose? (a bill for a "national cheese")

After completing *House Mouse*, *Senate Mouse*, ask questions similar to those asked following *Woodrow, the White House Mouse*.

- Would you classify this book as fiction or non-fiction?
- Why do you think the author choose mice as the main characters of this story?
- What do you think was the most important information in this book?
- What do you think was the author's primary purpose for writing this book? What else would you like to know about the Congress that the book did not tell you?
- In what ways does this book differ from *Woodrow, the White House Mouse*? (RI2.9)
- Which one do you prefer? Why?

### Activity # 3 Vocabulary for the Legislative Branch

Review the text of *House Mouse*, *Senate Mouse* for key vocabulary words related to the Legislative Branch of the United States Government. These words include *Capitol Hill*, *the House of Representatives*, *the Senate*, *Congress*, *law*, *the Speaker of the House*, *the Majority Leader*, and *bill* (RI2.4).

Refer to **Vocabulary Words for the Legislative Branch (Handout #3.1, page 22)** for a set of vocabulary words.

Have students write the words on their copy of the chart, **Branches of the United States Government (Handout #2.1)** (Note: In Lesson 5, these words will be mixed with vocabulary cards from other lessons in this unit and students will sort the vocabulary words according to the Branches of Government.)

### Activity # 4 Primary Source Photographs and Artifacts

Show pictures of the U.S. Capitol Building <http://www.dcpages.com/Hwdc/capitol.html>. Also, it would be helpful to have a picture of Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speaker\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_House\\_of\\_Representatives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speaker_of_the_United_States_House_of_Representatives)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Party\\_leaders\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Senate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Party_leaders_of_the_United_States_Senate)

Judge the accuracy of the photos in *House Mouse*, *Senate Mouse* by comparing the illustrations in the storybook with primary source photos (RL2.7 and RI2.7).

Student as Researcher: As a home study project, encourage students to conduct interviews with family members to find out the names and political party affiliation of members of the House of Representatives that represent their district and the names of the two Senators. Add names and photographs to the chart or pocket chart under the legislative branch.

## Activity # 5 Election of Class Representatives

Explain to students that the class is going to elect representatives who will introduce “bills” and make the laws of the classroom.

Note: It is best to keep the laws focused on the classroom because you will have control over enforcement of the laws. Avoid laws for the playground and lunchroom. If you have established classroom rules that you do not wish to change, you may select one specific topic for the new laws. Examples include use of the classroom library; completion of class assignments and homework; use of the class computer or centers in the classroom; housekeeping rules, etc.

### Step 1: Qualifications, Duties and Qualities

Determine the **qualifications** a representative to the Class Congress should have in order to “run for office.” (Note: Check your report card for qualities that might be included.)

Create a list of the **duties** of a representative to the Class Congress.

Brainstorm a list of **qualities** of a member of the Class Congress based upon the duties the representatives will have to perform. These may include:

- fair
- responsible
- follows classroom rules

### Step 2: Nominations and Selection of the Members of the Class Congress

Members of United States Congress are not elected by **all** the citizens of the country; they are elected by the people they represent. Therefore, students in each cooperative learning group will “elect” their own representative.

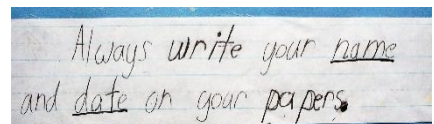
Rather than having a full election process, it is recommended students work in their groups to select the person who would like to be the representative of their group. For simplicity, only one representative per group will be selected, not members of both the Senate and the House.

## Activity # 6 Proposing Bills and Making Laws

(Optional) How a Bill Becomes a Law: A short 3 minute video, *How a Bill Becomes a Law*, is available on [www.TeacherTube.com](http://www.TeacherTube.com). Although listed for middle school, it goes through the process of how individuals write bills and how the ideas go to the Senate and the House and finally to the President to get signed. After the video, review the process of how a bill becomes a law and make a flow map to show the sequence.

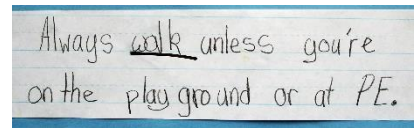
### Step 1: Propose Rules (Laws)

In the book *House Mouse, Senate Mouse*, the students in Miss Tuftmouse’s classroom write a letter to Congress with a suggestion for a new law. Explain to the students that they are going to propose bills to become a rule (law) for the classroom.



(Note: Refer to page 21 for an expanded version of this activity in which students write letters similar to those written by the students in Miss Tuftmouse’s classroom.)

First, students have a collaborative conversation with their group to brainstorm some ideas for a “bill” to create a new class rule (law) (SL2.3). The representative in each group should write down the proposed bills. During this time, it is



recommended that the teacher rotate around to the groups to review their proposed bills and help students word their bills in a positive format, such as “Walk in the classroom” rather than the negative “Don’t run in the classroom.” Once the bills have been reviewed, each representative can select a bill that he/she would like to propose to the Congress.

### **Step 2: Hold a Session of the Class Congress to Discuss the Proposed Bills.**

Members of the class sit in the “gallery” while the bills are presented and debated by the representatives on the “floor” of the Congress. After arguments for each bill have been heard, the members of Congress vote on each bill. The bills are then passed on to the Class President who reviews each bill and either signs it into law or vetoes the bill.

### **Activity # 7 Compare and Contrast**

Review the factual information about the United States Congress in the book *Mouse House, Senate House* and other sources used to learn about Congress. Make a Venn Diagram to compare your Class Congress with the Congress of the United States:

Our Class Congress

the United States Congress

Ask the students questions to help them interpret information in the Venn diagram. Compare and contrast the Class Congress with the United States Congress.

### **Activity # 8 How Does the U.S. Governments Work?**

Working in small groups, have students hold a collaborative conversation to discuss the compelling question, “How does the U.S. government work?” Each group should produce one or more complete sentences that provide details to answer the question (SL2.6).

As the groups share their sentences, provide guidance and support to help students strengthen their writing (W2.5). Save the sentences as a model to assist students when they write an informative/explanatory text to answer the compelling question.

### **Assessment**

The assessment of this lesson is integrated with the instruction and occurs throughout the lesson. Student products should provide evidence of attainment of the following:

- Write the **Vocabulary Words for the Legislative Branch of the United States Government** (Handout #3.1) into the proper category on **The Branches of the United States Government** (Handout #2.1).
- Participate in the election of class representatives
- Propose bills to the class congress.
- Compare and contrast the qualifications and duties of the Class Congress with those of the Congress of the United States
- Working in a group, write sentences to answer the compelling question, “How does the U.S. government work?”

## Variation for Activity # 6 – Writing Letters

In the book *House Mouse, Senate Mouse*, the students in Miss Tuftmouse’s classroom write a letter to Congress with a suggestion for a new law. Explain to the students that they are going to each write a letter to members of the Class Congress to propose a law for the classroom, giving attention to the appropriate conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing (L2.2).

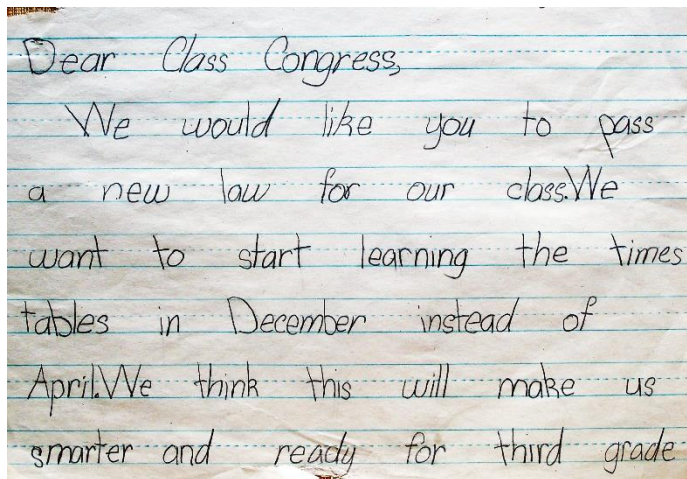
First, write a letter together to model the proper letter format. Have students brainstorm some ideas for class laws (pre-writing). Record these on the whiteboard. Select one and discuss the proposed wording of the law. Help students word it in a positive format (Walk in the classroom.) rather than negative (Don’t run in the classroom.)

Review the letter written by Miss Tuftmouse’s Second Grade Class. (It is helpful to display a copy of the letter.) Note areas where the letter could be improved. Suggestions include: add the date, use the proper greeting for a member of Congress, explain why the law would be a good one. Produce, expand, and rearrange complete simple and compound sentences (L2.1f).

In your model, write clear, coherent sentences. Review the letter and revise it to improve the sequence or to provide more descriptive detail. Model the use of commas in the greeting and closure and in the date. Capitalize all proper nouns, words at the beginning of the sentences and in the greeting, the month, the title and the initials of people (L2.2).

Using the stages of the writing process, have students write their letter to their representative in Congress. With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on the topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing (W2.5)

Refer to **Handout #3.2 on page 23** for a rubric. Review the rubric together so students have a clear vision of the expectations.



Once the letters have been completed, hold a session of the Class Congress to review the letters. Each representative can then select a bill that he/she would like to propose to the Congress. Members of class can sit in the “gallery” while the bills are presented and debated by the representatives on the “floor” of the Congress. After arguments for each bill have been heard, the members of Congress vote on each bill.

The bills are then passed on to the Class President who reviews each bill and either signs it into law or vetoes the bill.

**Vocabulary Words for the Legislative Branch**

**Senate**

**Majority  
Leader**

**Capitol Hill**

**bill**

**Congress**

**law**

**House of Representatives**

**Speaker of the House**



## Handout #3.2

# Rubric for Letter to Congress

**Prompt: Write a letter to your Class Congress suggesting a law for your classroom.**

### **A 4-point letter should include:**

- the date the letter was written
- greeting appropriate for a member of Congress
- proper use of commas in the greeting, closure, and with dates and words in a series
- capitalize proper nouns, words at the beginning of sentences and in greetings, months, titles and initials of people
- a suggestion for a new law written in a positive form
- a reason why the law is a good law
- clear, coherent sentences
- legible handwriting
- closing appropriate for a member of Congress

### **A 3-point letter has:**

- at least 3 parts of the basic letter format including the date, greeting, body, and closing
- fewer than 2 errors in the use of commas in the greeting, closure, and with dates and words in a series
- fewer than 2 errors in the capitalization of proper nouns, words at the beginning of sentences and in greetings, months, titles and initials of people
- a suggestion for a new law written in positive form
- a reason for the law
- clear sentences
- legible handwriting

### **A 2-point letter has:**

- at least 2 parts of the basic letter format including the date, greeting, body, and closing
- fewer than 4 errors in the use of commas in the greeting, closure, and with dates and words in a series
- fewer than 4 errors in the capitalization of proper nouns, words at the beginning of sentences and in greetings, months, titles and initials of people
- a suggestion for a new law written
- an attempt to write some sentences
- messy handwriting

### **A 1-point letter has:**

- an attempt to complete the assignment but the basic letter structure is missing
- multiple errors in commas and capitalization
- illegible handwriting

## Lesson 4: Who Determines If the Laws of the United States Are Fair?

### Materials needed for this lesson:

- Large chart of **Branches of the United States Government** (described on page 6) and the student copies begun during Lesson 2 (Handout #2.1, page 14).
- Copies for each student of the **Vocabulary Words for the Judicial Branch (Handout #4.1, page 26)** and, if desired, vocabulary cards for each new vocabulary word.
- (Optional) *Marshall, the Courthouse Mouse* by Peter W. and Cheryl Barnes

### Activity # 1 Who Determines If the Laws Are Fair?

(Note: Standard 2.3 states: ...*determining if laws have been violated*... Instead, this lesson uses ...*determines if laws are fair*...)

#### Step 1: Review the Laws Chart (Handout #1.1)

Return to the Laws Chart to see who determines if the rules are fair and/or who punishes the wrong-doers at home, in the classroom, and at the school. Ask students if they know who determines if the laws are fair and/or punishes the wrongdoers for the United States government? Note: Student responses may focus on the local police.

#### Step 2: Branches of the United States Government

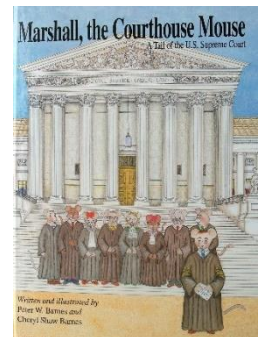
Introduce the **Judicial Branch**. Explain that the Supreme Court of the United States must **uphold the laws** of the United States. It is the **Justices** of the Supreme Court who decide (issue an **opinion**) whether to **uphold a law** or strike down a law as unconstitutional (RI2.4).

Explain to students that there are nine Supreme Court **Justices** who are led by the **Chief Justice**. Ask students, “Why do you think there is an odd number of judges?” (When they vote, there cannot be a tie.) The Supreme Court is called the **High Court**. States and local areas have what are called “lower courts” who “hear” cases before they go to the Supreme Court. Only the most important cases reach the Supreme Court. Explain to the students that unlike the Executive Branch and the Legislative Branch, the Supreme Court Justices of the Judicial Branch serve for life, or until they resign.

### Activity # 2 (Optional) *Marshall, the Courthouse Mouse*

Read the book, *Marshall, the Courthouse Mouse*, written and illustrated by Peter W. Barnes and Cheryl Shaw Barnes. On this first reading of the book, concentrate on the text and the illustrations. Analyze the illustrations for the information they reveal. Determine which parts of the illustrations might be factual and which might be fictional.

Explain that the Bill of Rights includes the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution. They were added in 1791 to protect certain rights of the citizens. Refer to pages 12 and 13 in *Marshall, the Courthouse Mouse* to identify any of the freedoms that were guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. One job of the Supreme Court is to preserve and protect these freedoms. Ask students what was wrong with the “cheese” law enacted by the Congress? Why did the Supreme Court “strike down” the law? What did they say in their “opinion?”





### Activity # 3 Vocabulary for the Judicial Branch

Review key vocabulary words and their definitions related to the Supreme Court. These words may include *judge, the Supreme Court of the United States, Justices, the Chief Justice, uphold a law, issue an “opinion”, the “High Court,”* and, *the “bench”* (RI2.4). To the large chart, **Branches of the United States Government**, add each new vocabulary word, or add the new vocabulary cards to the pocket chart.

Refer to **Vocabulary for the Judicial Branch (Handout # 4.1, page 26)** for a set of vocabulary cards. Have the students write the words under the Judicial Branch on Handout #2.1, page 14. (Note: In Lesson 5, students sort all the vocabulary words according to the Branches of Government.)

### Activity # 4 Primary Source Photographs

Display pictures of the United State Supreme Court Building and explain to students that this is where the justices work. Refer to <http://www.supremecourtus.gov/> (Supreme Court of the United States) Display photographs of the justices on the Supreme Court. Photos may be found on the above website under the tab, “About the Court” (RI2.7).

### Activity # 5 Appoint Class Judges

Have the Class President appoint 3 students to be Classroom Justices and explain the reasons for his/her choices. “I chose \_\_\_\_\_ because\_\_\_\_\_.” These appointments must be approved by a majority of the members of the Class Congress. The Representatives should meet and vote whether to Approve or Deny each appointment.

If there is any disagreement about the fairness of the classroom rules voted into law by the Class Congress, the Classroom Justices can meet “in conference” to discuss the case, decide whether to “hear” the case, “rule” whether the law is fair, and issue an opinion.

### Activity # 6 How Does the U.S. Governments Work?

Working in small groups, have students hold a collaborative conversation to discuss the compelling question, “How does the U.S. government work?” Adding to the sentences written in Lesson 3 (Activity #8), each group should produce one or more complete sentences that provide details about the Judicial Branch to answer the question (SL2.6).

As the groups share their sentences, provide guidance and support to help students strengthen their writing (W2.5). Save the sentences as a model to assist students in the next lesson when they write an informative/explanatory text to answer the compelling question.

### Assessment

Student products should provide evidence of attainment of the following:

- Write the **Vocabulary Words for the Judicial Branch of the United States Government** (Handout #4.1) into the proper category on **The Branches of the United States Government** (Handout #2.1)
- Working in a group, write sentences to answer the compelling question, “How does the U.S. government work?”

Vocabulary Words for the Judicial Branch

**Supreme Court**

**judge**

**the "High Court"**

**Justices**

**Chief Justice**

**the "bench"**

**uphold a law**

**opinion**

## Lesson 5: In the United States Government, Who Makes the Laws, Who Enforces the Laws, and Who Punishes the Wrongdoers?

### Materials needed for each student:

- copy of each student's **Laws Chart (Handout #1.1)** begun in Lesson 1
- copy of the **Branches of the United States Government (Handout #2.1)**
- **Vocabulary Words for the Branches of Government (Handout #5.1, page 28)**

### Activity # 1 Laws Chart

Return to the **Laws Chart (Handout #1.1)** begun during Lesson 1. Help students complete the United States Government section of the chart.

### Activity # 2 Sort the Vocabulary Words

#### Step 1: Vocabulary Words for the Branches of Government (Handout #5.1)

Distribute a copy Handout #5.1 to each small group. Have students cut apart the vocabulary words and practice sorting them into the three branches of the United States government. To provide extra practice, have students organize the vocabulary cards created during the unit into a pocket chart under the proper branch of government (RI2.4).

#### Step 2: Branches of the United States Government (Handouts #2.1 and #5.1)

Provide each student with a blank copy of Handout #2.1 and of Handout #5.1. As an assessment, have each student write the vocabulary words under the proper branch of government (RI2.4).

### Activity # 3 Show What You Know?

Assign each student to write an informative/explanatory text (W2.2) in which they:

- introduce the compelling question, "How Does the U.S. Government Work?"
- use facts and definitions about the President, Congress, and the Supreme Court.
- provide a concluding statement telling which branch of government they would like to work in and why.

### Assessment

The compelling question provides a framework for the evaluation of the lesson.

- Complete the United States Government section of the **Laws Chart (Handout #1.1)** Who Makes the Laws, Who Enforces Laws, Who Punishes Wrong-Doers?
- Write the **Vocabulary Words for the Branches of Government (Handout #5.1)** in the proper location on the chart, **Branches of the United States Government (Handout #2.1)**.
- Write an informative/explanatory text in which they introduce a topic (How Does the U.S. Government Work?), use facts and definitions about the President, Congress, and the Supreme Court, and provide a concluding statement telling which branch of government they would like to work in and why.

### Vocabulary Words for the Branches of Government

the “High Court”	Capitol Hill
uphold a law	bill
Chief Justice	Judge
Supreme Court	law
White House	Senate
Head of State	Oval Office
Chief Executive	the “bench”
Majority Leader	President
inauguration	Congress
Commander-in-Chief	Justices
Speaker of the House	veto
House of Representatives	opinion

## Extended Activities for A Kid's Guide to Laws and Government

**Class Constitution** Discuss why rules are needed. Using this information, write a class constitution outlining the rights and responsibilities of the students. After the constitution has been written and approved by a class vote, have each student sign it to signify approval. Refer to page 31 for a sample Class Constitution.

**Bulletin Board** Create a bulletin board display titled *In the News* with the following headings: *President, Congress, Supreme Court*. Invite students to skim through news magazines and newspapers for photos and articles about our government at work. Post them on the bulletin board under the appropriate heading.

**Interview to Find Out “How Many?”** How many presidents have there been since you were born? Ask a grown-up to tell you about the presidents who have served during their lifetime.

**Vote of the Day** During math time, have a “Vote of the Day.” Students complete a simple questionnaire and you record the results in the form of a graph. For example, “Vote for your favorite sport: baseball, basketball, kickball.” Assign one child to be in charge of ballots and the voter’s list while others count and tally ballots. Each day different groups can pose the question of the day and tally the results. The class can also vote on topics such as where the class should go on a field trip or the choice of a classroom mascot.

**Conduct a Class Poll** Discuss the definition of a poll as “asking a few people their opinion on a topic and then predicting the responses of many people based on the results of this poll.” Ask students to name their favorite color. Use the findings of the poll to determine the most popular colors. Based on your poll, what color do you believe would be the most popular with all second graders at our school? Why? Explain that “survey” is another word for poll. Ask “Why do presidential candidates use polls? How is this information helpful?”

**You Be the Judge** Ask students to recall the story of “The Three Bears” and list the things Goldilocks did. (She went into the bear’s house uninvited, she ate their food, she broke a chair, she slept in a bear’s bed, and she ran away when the bears found her.) Place students in small groups to make craft-stick puppets of Goldilocks, the three bears, and the judges. In their group, students create a finger play in which they “judge” Goldilocks’s actions and then decide whether they think Goldilocks broke any laws. Have each group share their decision.

**If I Were in Charge of the World** Have students write poems using the copy change method for “If I Were in Charge of the World.” The poem, written by Judith Viorst, can be found in the book by the same title. Make audio recordings of the poems and have students add drawings or other visual displays (SL2.5).

**Government Want-Ads** Sort students into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group one of the branches of the United States Government, including the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, or the Judicial Branch. Each group is to create a want ad for a person in their branch of the government. Listed should be the qualifications and job responsibilities.

For example:

President of the United States  
Must be a native U.S. citizen, age 35 or over.  
Must be able to live in Washington, D.C. and work long hours.  
Duties include...

## Resources for A Kid's Guide to Laws and Government

\*\* is a highly recommended book for this unit and \* is a recommended book.

Baicker, Karen. *The Election Activity Book: Dozens of Activities that Help Kids Learn about Voting, Campaigns, Our Government*. Scholastic Teaching Resources, 2012. Help students understand the election process with these quick, easy, and engaging activities that teach about how we elect our leaders; the presidency; the rights and responsibilities of voting; the differences between local, state, and national government. It includes a write & read mini-book, election time line, polling and graphing activities, updated and revised literature links and Web site connections.

\*\*Barnes, Peter W. and Cheryl Shaw. *House Mouse, Senate Mouse*. Little Patriot Press, 2012. This informational storybook tells about how our laws are made at the nation's Capitol. Part of the "Mice" book series that teaches about the institutions of the United States Government, this fanciful tale has the Squeaker of the House and the Senate Mouse-jority debating a law to declare a National Cheese proposed by Miss Tuftmouse's second grade class. It takes students through the legislative process, from the basic research of a bill, through committee consideration and to signing at the President's desk.

\*Barnes, Peter W. and Cheryl Shaw. *Marshall, the Courthouse Mouse*. Little Patriot Press, 2012. This informational storybook tells about our nation's judicial system and the Supreme Court. Part of the "Mice" book series that teaches about the institutions of the United States Government, this fanciful tale has Marshall J. Mouse, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United Mice of America, lead his fellow justices in deciding whether to uphold a law requiring all mice to eat the same cheese on certain days, or to strike the law down, giving the mice the freedom to eat any cheese they want, any time.

\*\*Barnes, Peter W. and Cheryl Shaw. *Woodrow, the White House Mouse*. Little Patriot Press, 2012. Every four years, like the rest of us do, the mice of the nation elect someone too. This informational storybook tells about the presidency and the nation's most famous house, the White House. Part of the "Mice" book series that teaches about the institutions of the United States Government, this fanciful tale has the United Mice of America elect Woodrow G. Washingtail as their president.

\*Barnes, Peter W. and Cheryl Shaw. *Woodrow for President: A Tail of Voting, Campaigns, and Elections*. Little Patriot Press. 2012. Featuring Woodrow G. Washingtail, a civic-minded mouse with presidential ambitions, *Woodrow for President* follows Woodrow as he runs for president of the United Mice of America.

Branches of Government, Set of 3 Posters. Item # 7008P. Knowledge Unlimited. Displayed together, these three posters help students compare the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. Displays show the qualifications, terms of office, and basic duties of the president, members of Congress, and justices of the Supreme Court. 17"h X 11" w. Under \$15. <http://www.knowledgeunlimited.com/index.html>. On the left side of the page, click on Posters. In the Search box, type in "Branches of Government."

Brown, Marc. *Arthur Meets the President*. An Arthur Adventure (Arthur Adventure Series). Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 1992. Arthur is a proud American when he wins the essay content and is rewarded by reading it to the President in Washington D.C.

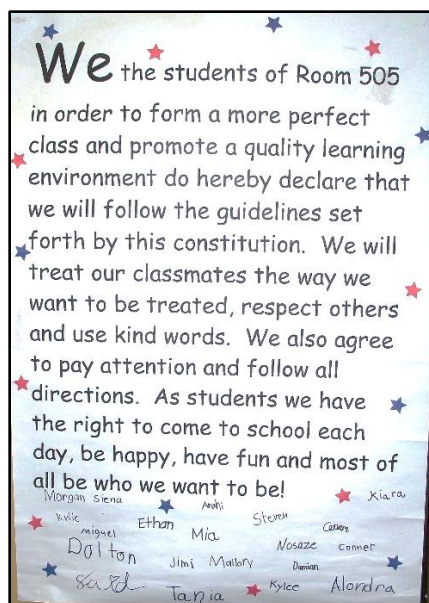
Buchanan, Shelly. *Our Government: The Three Branches* (Primary Source Readers). Teacher Created Materials, 2014. The nation's founders split the government into three branches. This ensured that no one person would have too much power. Colorful images, supporting text, a glossary, table of contents, and index all work together to help young readers better understand the content.

*Citizens Rule: How We Elect a President* (Video) Available from Discovery Education Streaming Plus

Cronin, Doreen. *Duck for President*. Betsy Lewin, illustrator. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2004. Here is a duck who began in a humble pond. He worked his way to farmer, to governor, and now, perhaps, to the highest office in the land. The text is funny for kids and adults.

Viorst, Judith. *If I Were in Charge of the World and Other Worries: Poems for Children and their Parents*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1984, Reprint edition. This classic book contains a collection of humorous poetry that young children can identify with. Written with humor and understanding, Judith Viorst's poems are certain to delight children and adults alike -- and be read again and again.

Recommended resources from *Reflections* by Harcourt School Publishers include: *Time for Kids Reader* written by Jeri Cipriano, and copies of the Reader's Theatre, "A Student Government Team" from the *Social Studies in Action* Teacher Resource book.



*A Class Constitution*  
Refer to Extended Activities page 29.

# **A Kid's Guide to Laws and Government: Step-by-Step Activities to Teach Children How Laws Are Made, How the President is Elected, the Structure of the U.S. Government, and More!**

## **AUTHOR**

Priscilla Porter lives in Palm Desert, California with her husband Chuck and their shelter dog Hawk. Dr. Porter is the Director of the Porter History-Social Science Resource Room at the Palm Desert Campus of California State University San Bernardino. A former elementary school teacher, she is the author of many popular curriculum guides for teachers and is the senior author of *Reflections*, a Kindergarten to Grade 6 social studies textbook series published by Harcourt School Publishers and adopted by the State of California.

This is the first book in the series of Step-By-Step Activities for 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers. Available SOON in the series will be *Exploring Family History*, *Expanding Map Skills*, and *Biographies of People Who Have Made a Difference*.

To hear about her latest books first, sign up for her exclusive **New Release Mailing List** by sending an email to [prisporter@aol.com](mailto:prisporter@aol.com). The next books in her grade level-specific series for teachers of Kindergarten to Grade 5 will be released later this year. Let her know your grade level of interest, you'll be glad you did!

**Requesting Your Review** – Reviews are very important to authors. If you've enjoyed this book, please write a review of it on [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com)