

LawCraft

a game guide for teachers

In *LawCraft* students play a representative or senator in the U.S. Congress. They choose an issue and select from a variety of amendments to create a bill, while paying attention to how much support each amendment has among other members. After passing the bill, the player works to compromise with the other chamber—and, if necessary, the president—to create a bill that will be signed into law.



Learning Objectives

- Given a national issue, balance competing interests to create a law.
- Simulate the law-making process of the U.S. Congress.
- Make connections between the text of an amendment and the values it represents.
- Evaluate cause and effect relationships.

Prerequisites

LawCraft does not require any pre-teaching. However, some background knowledge will help give the game context. We suggest teaching the iCivics lesson *Why Do We Have a House and a Senate Anyway?* the day before your class plays the game.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

1. Choose a character

Enter your first and last name and choose an avatar. Decide whether to be a member of the Senate or the House of Representatives, and a Republican or a Democrat. Also choose a personal value. This will be the value you stand for during the game

2. Choose a state to represent

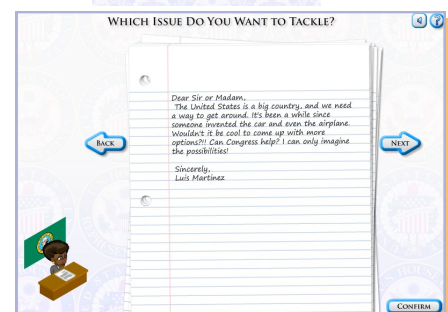
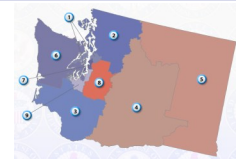
If you are playing as a senator, you will represent an entire state. If you are playing a representative, a new screen will ask you to choose which district you want to represent within your state.

3. Start playing the game by choosing an issue

Read through a stack of letters from your constituents to find an issue you would like to pass a law about.

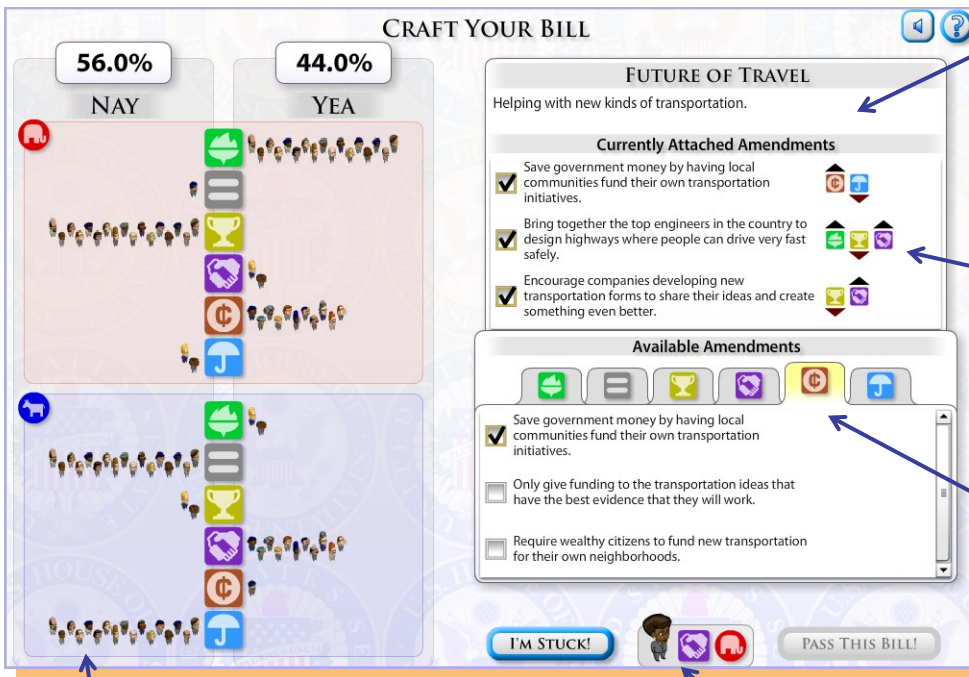
TIP: Make sure students use their real names if you plan to collect a printout of their game statistics at the end.

TIP: Have students play the game more than once, as both a senator and a representative.



HOW TO CRAFT A BILL

After you select your issue, you will begin crafting your bill. You will do this by attaching amendments to your bill until it has enough support (and the right kind of support) to pass.



1 Your bill appears in the upper right corner with any amendments you have attached to it.

2 Arrows and value symbols show which values your amendments appeal to.

3 Available amendments are grouped according to the values they support. Attach them by checking boxes.

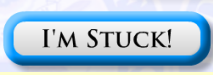
5 The people are other members of Congress standing behind values that are important to them. When you select an amendment, members who like it will rush into the "yea" column to support your bill. But watch out—they will go back to the "nay" side if you choose a new amendment that doesn't agree with their values.

4 If you try to attach an amendment that disagrees with your own values, YOU will not let the bill pass.

When you have gained the necessary support for your bill, move to the next stage by clicking Pass This Bill!



TIP: Click the I'm Stuck! button to pick a new issue, choose a new party or value, or create a new legislator.



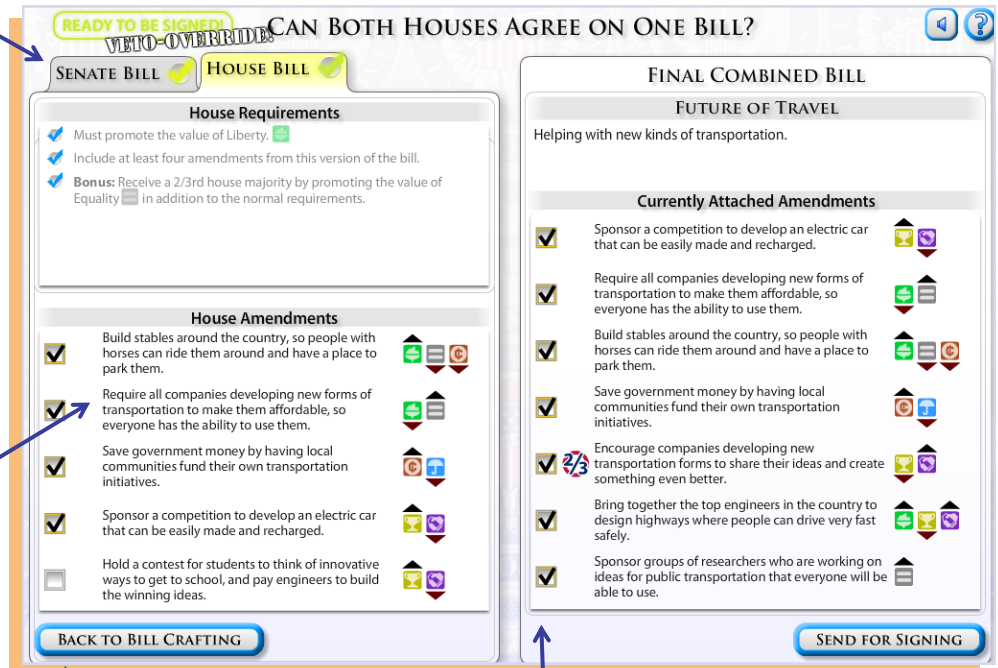
HOW TO CREATE A COMPROMISE BILL

You're just getting started: now you'll have to compromise with the other house of Congress, which may have an entirely different bill on the same issue! The next screen asks, "Can Both Houses Agree on One Bill?" Here you create a compromise bill to send to the president for signing.

6 These tabs show the requirements for each house. You will add more amendments to your bill to meet the requirements, which are checked off the list as they're met.

7 Available amendments are here. Arrows and value symbols show which values each amendment appeals to.

TIP: Amendments marked 2/3 will give you a 2/3 majority vote, making your bill unstoppable when it reaches the president's desk!



8 If you can't make it work with the available amendments, click here to go back and change your bill.

9 You can look over the combined bill here. When you're ready, click "Send for Signing" to send it to the president!

GETTING THE BILL SIGNED

If you didn't manage to make your bill veto-proof, the president can veto it. If that happens, even more requirements will show up in a new tab. You will have to work more on your bill if you want the president to sign it! This may involve adding more amendments. Once the new requirements are met, you can send the bill back to the president.

If your bill is veto-proof, the veto will be overridden. Once the president signs a bill or a veto is overridden, the game ends.

THE GAME CERTIFICATE

When the game ends, you can view and print a game certificate that details the game play.

TIP: To have students print out their results from the game, have them click Print Certificate. To have them print the law they created, have them click Print My Law.



ABOUT POLITICAL PARTIES AND VALUES

Because values and political parties are necessary elements of a realistic recreation of how laws are made, *LawCraft* includes these elements. Here are the descriptions of the political parties and values exactly as they are worded in the game. The political party descriptions are taken from the parties' 2008 presidential platforms.

REPUBLICAN PARTY

Our Republican ideals are those that unify our country: Courage in the face of foreign foes. An optimistic patriotism, driven by a passion for freedom. Devotion to the inherent dignity and rights of every person. Faith in the virtues of self-reliance, civic commitment, and concern for one another. Distrust of government's interference in people's lives. Dedication to a rule of law that both protects and preserves liberty.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY

We believe that every American, whatever their background or station in life, should have the chance to get a good education, to work at a good job with good wages, to raise and provide for a family, to live in safe surroundings, and to retire with dignity and security.

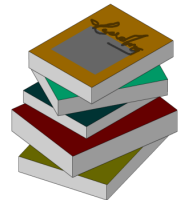
-  **Liberty**
means that people have the freedom to do things that they want to do.
-  **Equality**
means that everyone is treated fairly and has an equal chance.
-  **Competition**
means that people are encouraged to compete to succeed.
-  **Cooperation**
means that people are encouraged to work together to get things done.
-  **Cost Saving**
means that the government is not spending a lot of money.
-  **Generosity**
means the government is providing large benefits or services to citizens.

CLASSROOM CONVERSATION STARTERS

Pre-Game Questions

You can use these questions to lead into playing *LawCraft* in the classroom.

- Congress has two parts. What are they, and what is the difference between them?
 - ◊ *The Senate and the House of Representatives. Each state has two senators; representatives represent smaller districts within each state.*
- What is a bill?
 - ◊ *A bill is a draft of a law, before it actually becomes a law.*
- What power does the president have in the lawmaking process?
 - ◊ *The president can either sign or veto a bill. A vetoed bill returns to Congress.*



Post-Game Questions

Use these questions as a way to debrief the individual experiences of playing *LawCraft*.

- What was your goal in your own house of Congress, before the compromise process?
 - ◊ *To craft a bill that supported their own value, had the support of the majority of their own political party, and had majority support in the entire house.*
- Why do you think the compromise process involves adding so many amendments?
 - ◊ *Other members of Congress in each house have their own values and their own goals for the bill. In order to pass, it has to appeal to many people.*
- Was it difficult to stick with your chosen value? Did you have to add an amendment that did not support your value? (i.e., Did YOU have to compromise?)
- Why might the president veto a bill?
 - ◊ *It might conflict with the president's own values, or the president might want something added to or removed from the bill.*
- What do you think could happen if there was no compromise process? No veto power?

Activity Idea

- Ask students to create a flow chart showing the lawmaking process (or create one together as a class.) Have students develop the chart from scratch using what they remember from the game. *(The chart should show each chamber crafting and passing separate bills; a compromise process; and the president signing or vetoing. An awesome chart will show the vetoed bill returning for a 2/3 vote!)*

But Wait— There's More!

The NEW LawCraft Extension Pack now available! Make your students' game play more meaningful with activities designed specifically for LawCraft. This easy-to-use Extension Pack helps you give context and purpose to the game and reinforce the game concepts. That means deeper learning for students, and best practices around game-centered learning for you! Extension Packs require PowerPoint and are designed for use with projectors or interactive whiteboards. You can find this great resource linked from the game page or in our lesson plans.