

# Understanding the Work of the Legislature

## Summary

Students will prepare for, participate in, and analyze a visit from a state legislator.

## **Enduring Understanding:**

Students will understand the functions of the legislative branch in the United States.

## **Essential Questions:**

What is the role of state government in the United States federal system?

What powers are given to state and local governments?

What are some current issues affecting state and local government?

## Time Frame

2 class periods of 90 minutes each

## Group Size

Large Groups

## Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Communication, Social & Civic Responsibility

## Materials

[How do you feel about representative democracy?](#)

[Legislator's Day Planner](#)

## Background for Teachers

Teacher should review the basic functions of the legislative branch at the federal and state levels.

## Student Prior Knowledge

Basic knowledge of the U.S. Constitution as it relates to the functions of the three branches of government.

## Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will understand the role of state government in the United States federal system.

Students will understand the powers given to state and local governments.

Students will examine current issues affecting state and local government.

## Instructional Procedures

### **1. At least one month prior to teaching this lesson:**

Contact a state senator or representative from your school area about coming to speak to your classes. Send them a copy of the "Life as a Legislator" handout to complete before they come to class. Tell them that you would like them to take 30-45 minutes discussing the issues on the form with students and answering their questions. Tell them that they may want to consult the National Conference of State Legislators website for tips on making their visit a successful one.

### **2. The day before your classroom visit:**

Pass out the KWL worksheet to the students. Ask them to fill in the "K" and "W" sections. If they have a hard time coming up with anything they want to know, give them suggestions. Collect these worksheets.

Ask the class if they know who represents them in the federal and state legislatures. If not, ask them where they would go about looking up that information. Discuss these sources (websites, phone book, voter's guide).

Have the students get into groups of approximately three students. Pass out copies of the phone book (or pages from it). Have them look at the voting district map and determine their representatives. Have them write down the contact information for each representative.

Tell the students that you have a legislator scheduled to visit with their class during your next class period. In preparation for the legislators visit tell them that you would like them to take the **"How do you feel about representative government?"** quiz on paper or online (preferable). After taking the quiz, have them total their scores. Tell them that they will be re-taking the quiz after their legislator's visit.

Pass out slips of paper to the students. Ask them to write down at least one question for their legislator. Collect the questions for distribution to the legislator on the next day.

#### 7. **On the day of the visit:**

Welcome the legislator to your room. Give them about 30 minutes to speak and then have them answer the questions written by your students the day before and any other questions that might have come up.

Thank your legislator for coming to your class. Invite them to stay for the rest of the period if they would like.

Pass out their "How do you feel about representative government?" quiz once again. Have them re-answer the questions and total their scores.

Have all of those students whose scores were *higher* than the first time they took the test come to the front of the room and all of those whose scores were *lower* go to the back.

Discuss their movement. Why did their opinions change?

Have the students pull out their KWL sheets. Have them add information that they have learned from the legislator's visit. Discuss.

As an extension to this lesson, or as a replacement to the KWL activity, you may want to complete the "Legislator's Day Planner" either in groups or as a class on an overhead.

#### Assessment Plan

Students will complete the KWL and "How do you feel about representative government?" activities. As an alternate assessment, students may complete the "Legislator's Day Planner" activity.

#### Bibliography

[America's Legislators Back to School Week Website](#)

#### Authors

[MARY MOULTON](#)

[JANET SANDERS](#)