



# VOTE SMART

## JUST THE FACTS

### Lesson 2 - The Legislative Branch

#### **Standards: National Council for the Social Studies**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.3: Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).

NCSS 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

NCSS 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

NCSS 6: Power, Authority and Governance

#### **Objectives:**

SWBAT (students will be able to) name the two chambers of Congress.

SWBAT know the difference in chamber sizes, constituency sizes and lengths of terms.

SWBAT understand the major congressional leadership positions.

#### **Subject Matter:**

House of Representatives, Senate, bicameral legislature, congressional leadership positions

#### **Materials:**

- Access to internet
- A Smartboard/projector/TV
- Computers for students (or print out the website pages)
- Note Cards

#### **Procedure: (60-70 min)**

##### Set/Hook/Warm up - Video:

Show [this](#) educational video on the two chambers of Congress:

Ask for questions at the end, and then test students with a few questions about what they just saw. Ask if they can recall the names of the two chambers, which one is bigger, and which one has longer terms.

**Lesson Essential Question:** What are the two houses of Congress, and what are their basic functions?

### Activity 1 - Website Research:

Have students research for themselves what Congress is/does using [votesmart.org](http://votesmart.org). This exercise should work to give students an introduction to research and provide foundational knowledge of Congress. Pass out the worksheet (Venn Diagram) for this activity, and walk around the room to make sure students are on task. If students struggle to find the helpful page on the website, give them the hint to look for "Government 101," followed by "Congress."

### Activity 2 - Note Card Activity:

1. Explain to students that they will be learning about the leadership within Congress in this activity. Each chamber has leaders who shape how decisions are made and how the process of making decisions works. To give students a visual for this project, display the "House and Senate Hierarchy" attachment on the projector/smartboard.
2. Have students get out note cards and writing utensils.
3. Read the names of the positions listed on "Civics Lesson 2 Activity 2 Teacher's Guide," along with the explanation of what they do. Tell students to write the name of the position on the front of the card, and the description of the corresponding responsibility on the back.
4. The descriptions on the sheet are short and ideal for this notecard activity, but it may be necessary to give a more thorough explanation of each position before having students write on their notecards.
5. Once students have filled out notecards with the names and descriptions below, separate students into groups of two.
6. Have them quiz each other on the different positions for about 15 minutes.

### Cool Down Exercise:

Use the slides labeled "Lesson 2 Cool Down." Make two teams out of the class to make the game more exciting. The way the game works:

Pull up a slide with a distinguishing characteristic about one of the chambers. Instruct the students to raise their hands as soon as they think they know what chamber the slide corresponds to. Call on the first student to raise his/her hand. If the correct answer was given, award his/her team with a point. However, if s/he answers incorrectly, deduct a point from the team total. If nobody raises his/her hand at first, allow the teams to talk over what they believe the answer is. Depending on the score of the game and level of interest, offer more points for the harder questions at the end.

### Assessment:

The teacher will collect the venn diagram and give a grade based on completion and accuracy. The teacher will informally assess student comprehension and participation during the note card activity.

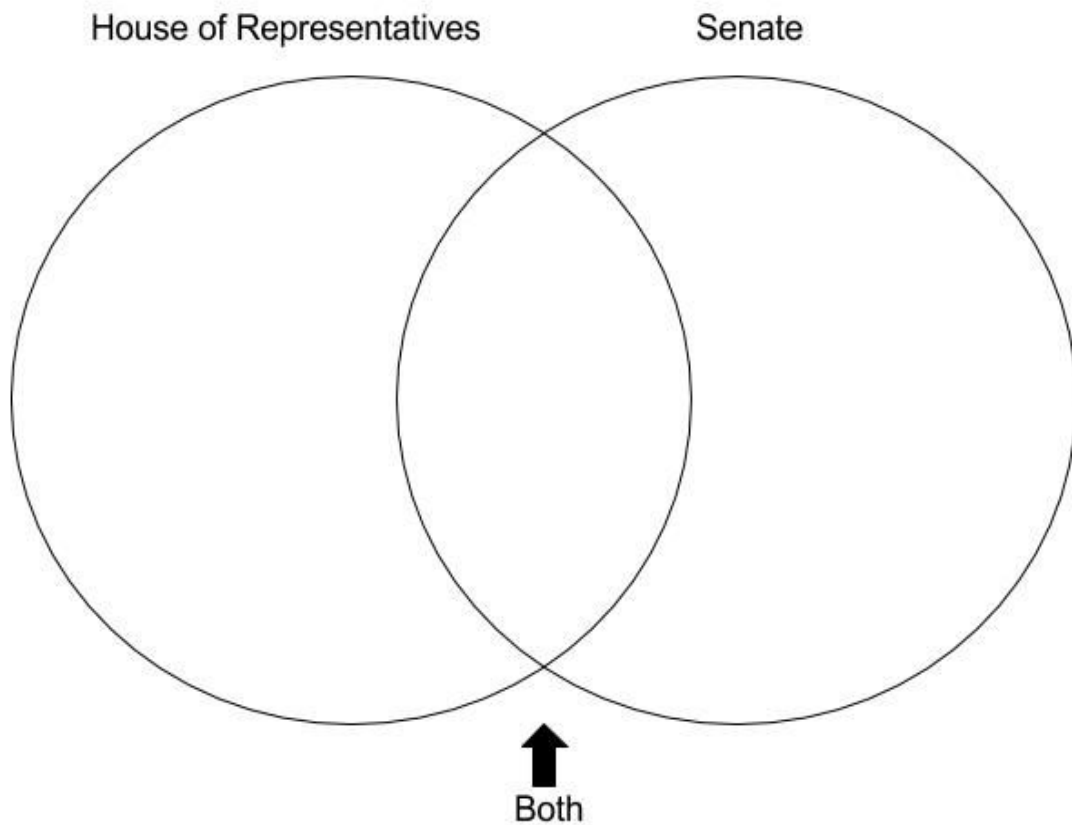
### Self-Reflection:

## Venn Diagram Activity

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Use this Venn Diagram to show what you can find on the two chambers of Congress.

1. Visit [votesmart.org](http://votesmart.org)
2. Click on the "Government 101" link at the bottom of the webpage
3. Click on the "Congress" link
4. Fill out the left with the characteristics of the House of Representatives, the right with characteristics of the Senate, and the middle with characteristics that the two chambers share



## **Civics Lesson 2 Activity 2 Teacher's Guide**

1. Explain to students that they will be learning about the leadership within Congress in this activity. Each chamber has leaders who shape how decisions are made and how the process works.
2. Have students get out note cards and writing utensils.
3. Read the names of the positions listed below, along with the explanation of what they do. Tell students to write the name of the position on the front of the card, and the description of the corresponding responsibility on the back.
4. The descriptions given below are short and ideal for this notecard activity, but it may be necessary to give a more thorough explanation of each position before having students write on their notecards.
5. Once all students have filled out notecards with the names and descriptions below, separate students into groups of two.
6. Have them quiz each other on the different positions for about 15 minutes.

### **Speaker of the House**

I have the most powerful position in the lower house. I assign bills to committees and appoint select and conference committee members.

### **Vice-President**

I serve as president of the Senate. Although I cannot participate in debates, I can vote in the case of a tie.

### **President Pro Tempore**

I preside over the Senate in the absence of the vice-president. The caucus of the majority party chose me for this post.

### **House Majority Whip**

As majority party leader in the lower house, I exert pressure on party members to vote with the party. I am responsible for getting my party's program enacted into law.

### **Senate Majority Leader**

I have the role of leadership in the upper house responsible for passage of the majority party's programs. I inform and pressure party members to vote for programs. I also determine the order in which bills are to be debated.

### **Senate Minority Leader**

I am the leader of the smaller party in the upper house responsible for resisting programs submitted by the majority.

**Senate Minority Whip**

I am the minority party leader in the upper house who informs members when important bills are scheduled for a vote. My usual goal is to oppose majority bills.

**House Majority Leader**

I have control of the dominant party in the lower house, and I am responsible for enactment of our party's programs.

**House Minority Whip**

I am the party leader in the lower house who informs members and assists the minority leader in resisting some of the majority party's programs.

Definitions taken from: <https://quizlet.com/2936851/leadership-in-congress-flash-cards/>

## Senate and House Hierarchy

### House of Representatives Leadership Structure

The Speaker of the  
House

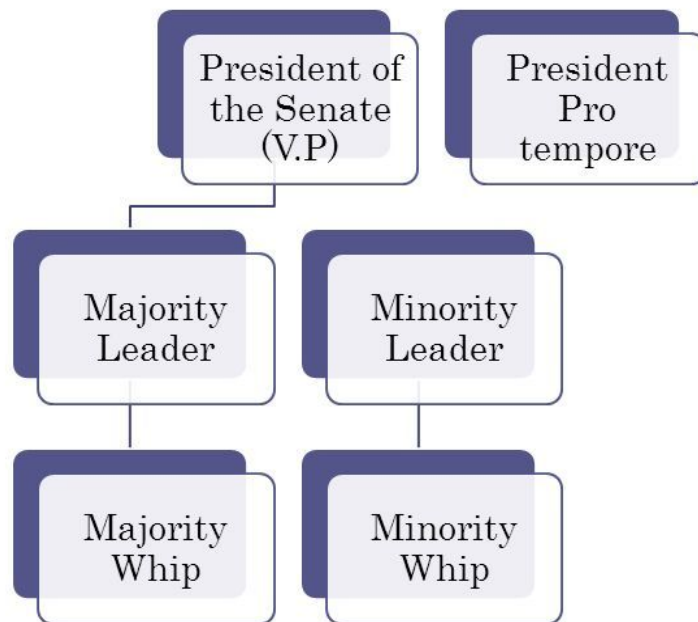
Majority Leader

Minority Leader

Majority Whip

Minority Whip

# Congressional Leadership - Senate



Diagrams taken from:

<https://blog.pism.pl/img/images/4915.jpg>

[http://images.slideplayer.com/21/6297873/slides/slide\\_37.jpg](http://images.slideplayer.com/21/6297873/slides/slide_37.jpg)