



# Mock Senate

Grade Level: 8-12  
Length: 2 weeks  
[www.pwsrcac.org/lessons](http://www.pwsrcac.org/lessons)

Adapted from Barbara Browning, Homer High School

## AK State Standards

### Government & Citizenship

E: A student should have the knowledge and skills necessary to participate effectively as an informed and responsible citizen [and be able to]: 3) exercise political participation by discussing public issues, building consensus, becoming involved in political parties and political campaigns, and voting; 4) establish, explain, and apply criteria useful in evaluating rules and laws.

## Related Resources

### Worksheets

Sample Bill; Mock Senate Guidelines

### Websites

- <http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/start.asp>
- <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/>

**Pair With** Human Significance of the 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Lesson

## Overview

Important legislation surrounding oil spill prevention and restoration and energy development and conservation must go through a rigorous process.

## Objectives

- Students will understand the legislative process.
- Students will participate in a senate simulation.
- Students will experience the give and take, the party alliances, and the stress and preparations involved in passing legislation.

## Materials

- Sample Bill
- Mock Senate Guidelines
- Roberts Rules of Order (available online)
- Journals or Notecards
- Pens or Pencils

## Background

As a result of the Exxon Valdez oil spill many types of legislative bills were introduced both at the state and national levels. In recent years, many bills related to the development of renewable energy sources, cleaner energy technologies, and innovations in conservation have been deliberated. Introducing new, or changing old, legislation is a long and complicated process yet one that should be understood by citizens. Understanding the difficulties in making and changing laws will help students gain insight into the political process and the challenges of trying to implement change. The Mock Senate exercise is

## Notes

an opportunity for students to research issues of importance to their state and to role play the political process where they will introduce bills important to them. The Mock Senate exercise, developed by Barbara Browning, has been used with high success rates in her Homer High School classroom. Students enjoy being involved in the entire process.

The Senate can hold subcommittee hearings, committee hearings, and then, a final hearing on the floor before the full Senate for each issue or bill. Finally, one bill is passed out of the Senate. The same happens in the House. The Senate and House then get together in conference and basically make trade-offs, concessions, compromises, etc., to pass one combined bill. The bill goes to the President who signs it into law or vetoes it.

## Introducing the Lesson

Ask students if they remember learning about the process of passing a bill. List, on the board, points and procedures they remember. Ask students how they think companies such as Exxon are regulated. What do they think it takes to set aside land as a national park or a wildlife refuge? Introduce the idea of a “Mock Senate” where students will actually play the roles of legislators and write and pass bills.

## Activity

1. Each student must pick a party affiliation and research their own state to find oil spill/energy issues and viewpoints of their state and their party. They will present a state profile. (See Mock Senate Guidelines). Have students present their information in outline form.
2. Elect or appoint a President of the Senate and a Secretary. Have the President review the roles of each “elected official.” Inform them that the President will be responsible for presenting a sample bill and explaining the rules of conduct in the Senate.
3. Introduce the sample bill. Review the format. Have students copy the format in their journals.
4. Tell the students they will be responsible for introducing two (2) bills. One bill must concern an energy-related economic change that would benefit their state and/or nation; one must solve or deal with an oil-related problem in their state and/or the nation. Have students review proposed bills related to these topics by searching the Alaska Bill Action Status Inquiry System

- (<http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/start.asp>) and the national GovTrack.us database (<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/>)
5. This exercise assumes that the students are already familiar with party roles, legislative proceedings, passing bills, etc. If this is not the case, you will need to review some of these aspects with the students.
  6. The Senate proceedings should run by Roberts' Rules of Order. Students should be encouraged to assume the viewpoints of their respective party affiliation. The bills they introduce should also reflect their party's viewpoint.
  7. During the Senate sessions have students submit a newspaper item about the Senate proceedings. It may be an article, letter to the editor, political cartoon, etc. It must concern someone or something that happens in the Senate proceedings. It should be typed or drawn in black ink.
  8. The key to the success of the Mock Senate is participation. Students need to be encouraged to introduce bills or amendments and to speak in defense of or in opposition to other bills, etc. The Mock Senate should be in session for at least one week in order to give students ample time to participate in the entire process.
  9. Each day take the first 5 minutes and have the students write a reaction to the session the day before either in their journals or on 8x10 note cards.
  10. As a final activity, the secretary should publish, in the school paper or on the school website, a list of bills passed by the Senate. Have the sponsors of each passed bill write a short summary of the purpose and intent of the bill. Compare bills passed in the Mock Senate to state and federal legislative happenings.

## Wrap-up

Discuss how their experience in the Mock Senate reinforced or changed students' perceptions about the legislative process.

## Assessment

Have students submit a public comment or letter to the editor about current local, state, or national legislation in reference to energy, oil spills, environmental restoration, fisheries, subsistence or wildlife. Be sure that the students' comments reflect their own opinions and provide an option for students to remain anonymous. Students who successfully meet the performance expectation will (1) clearly advocate for a piece of legislation based on criteria they've established for evaluating rules and laws and (2) demonstrate an ability to discuss public issues.

## Pair With

- Human Significance of the 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Lesson