**Nebraska State Government 101**

**Lesson Plan**

This two-part lesson introduces students to the three branches of government at the state level, with a deep dive into the legislative branch and how a bill becomes a law in Nebraska. The lesson challenges students to think about their role in our state government processes and the power of their own voice. Each part of the lesson can be a stand-alone as well.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Overview** | **Outcomes** |
| In Part 1, participants will:* Learn about the three branches of government at the state level.
* Learn about the history and make-up of the Nebraska Unicameral.
* Complete an interactive activity about how a bill becomes a law in Nebraska.
* Review Unicameral facts.

In Part 2, participants will:* Read and analyze a sample legislative bill.
* Participate in a mock committee hearing.
 | As a result of this lesson, participants will be able to:1. Identify the role of all three branches of government, and distinguish between their representatives at the federal and state level.
2. Explain the reasons why Nebraska has a Unicameral.
3. Understand the public’s role in the law-making process in Nebraska.

**Essential Question:** Why is it important to participate in state government? |



**Part 1: 30-45 minutes**

 **Part 2: 60 minutes**

**Materials Required**:

Part 1: [Nebraska State Government 101 Presentation](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1TMvAFrVSBWIpMktFGZUO4kOvxLqf7W3BEuEfL9Cbt84/edit#slide=id.p10); [NE Legislative Process Handouts](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Kc4gVF-RctMhxvAhrpCz-Jv_E9v4__nO); [How a Bill Becomes a Law Signs](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1SRkkccVxJd_Ad67Fy5SZLPmHbWcKDBcA)

Part 2: [LB1108](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KLSX8wUL48lRiCaeQq2nFJQw3I5SShNW/view?usp=sharing), [Bill Introduction](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1M6K19IatKnjFsUAvmxyz31ULC68DfJVl/view?usp=sharing), [Proponent 1](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ror8vqSdovtL4yxA0np8dIBgRWZVMEi2), [Proponent 2](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1qazH1dHk5f1cf4D9o9ZlyQV-a2BimV--), [Opponent 1](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1edBhFIO8UxdtcNlXiSIPfI4GhkAExaOS), [Opponent 2](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1gH-yYNcZXLbmbs8LANgx1UBomaV7XhxO), [Committee Chair Script](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Xg5fKHGQoFVulqoKgbCS5E_8hWoXjWaX/view?usp=sharing)

**Other Resources**

* [Unicameral Information Office handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ZLIvTE14vcCjxORpEb-uW0mAR01tnNQ1)
* [Capitol Classroom](https://nebraskalegislature.gov/education/capitol_classroom.php)
* [Nebraska State Government Website](https://www.nebraska.gov)
* [FAQs on the Nebraska Legislature](https://nebraskalegislature.gov/faq/faq.php)

**Step-by-Step Guide: Part 1 (30-45 minutes)**

*Phase 1: Presentation, Exploration and Explanation of Content (15-20 minutes)*

Use the **Nebraska State Government 101 Presentation** to present the content to students. There are notes on each slide with more detailed information pertaining to each topic.

* You may want to update Slide 7 on the PowerPoint related to the legislative branch. Include a picture of and information about the state senator for your area. To find out who your senator is, you can type your address into the finder on the legislature’s website: <https://nebraskalegislature.gov>
* When you get to the section about How a Bill Becomes a Law (Slide 11), you may choose to pass out **NE Legislative Process Handouts** to students.

*Phase 2: Guided Practice and Collaboration (5-10 minutes)*

After going through the **How a Bill Becomes a Law** process, students will complete an interactive activity putting the law-making steps in the correct order (This occurs at Slide 14, YOUR TURN).

* Hand out **How a Bill Becomes a Law Signs** to a number of students. Instruct students with signs to come to the front of the classroom and put themselves in the correct order. Assign one volunteer to come to the front and walk the class through the process, explaining each step. You may want to help guide this “review” process, doing some call and response with students.

*Phase 3: Assessment, Independent Action (5-10 minutes)*

After the Guided Practice activity, you can conduct a call and response style “quiz” over the basic Unicameral facts on Slide 15. You may choose to make this a written quiz or implement another form of assessment here.

*Wrap-Up, Review and Connections (5-10 minutes)*

Discuss any student reflections on the topic. You may choose to implement a guided reflection activity of some kind here.

If your students will be attending the [Capitol Experience Day](https://www.civicnebraska.org/civic-health-program/capitol-experience-days/) field trip, you can prepare them for “what to expect” during the field trip here. Talk again about the three branches of government and the speaker line-up during the day.

If your students will be participating in a mock committee hearing, either via Part 2 of this lesson and/or during the Capitol Experience Day field trip, you may want to make connections between this lesson and the forthcoming hearing, focusing on the committee hearing process and the role of the public in that aspect of the lawmaking process in Nebraska.

Something else to consider here for a higher level processing connection might be to compare what students learned about the Unicameral versus state government elsewhere. Essentially, what makes the Unicameral different/unique from other state governments?

**Step-by-Step Guide: Part 2 (~60 minutes)**

*Phase 1: Presentation, Exploration and Explanation of Content (5-10 minutes)*

Review the Unicameral Facts learned in Part 2, you may reference Slide 15 to review. Then review the legislative process (Slide 11) and point out the committee hearing as the portion being practiced through this lesson. Then, [provide a more detailed overview of the committee hearing process in Nebraska](https://nebraskalegislature.gov/about/testifying.php). You may choose to reference Slide 12 on the **Nebraska State Government 101 Presentation**, which shows a picture of a real committee hearing room and also has corresponding information in the notes. The link above is also helpful.

We recommend writing down the committee hearing roles for students to see up on the board. You can use this list to assign the roles later on. Go through each role’s responsibilities and expectations.

* Bill Sponsor
* Committee Members
* Committee Chairperson
* Testifiers (Proponents, Opponents, and Neutral)
* Audience

*Phase 2: Guided Practice and Collaboration (30 minutes)*

**Assigning roles (5 minutes):** You will assign students their roles for the hearing. The simulation requires seven committee members (or really any odd number, depending on how large your class is), a bill sponsor, and at least four testifiers (two proponents of the bill and two opponents). Note that additional testifiers may be added as time allows if students wish to develop their own or share testimony from the pre-written guides. Be sure that the committee has an odd number of members to avoid tie votes, and designate one student as the committee chairperson. There are corresponding documents for all roles in the hearing, including the committee chairperson script, bill introduction, and pre-written testimony.

**Comprehending LB1108 (15 minutes):** After you have assigned roles, pass out and review copies of LB1108. Guide students through a close reading of the bill, clarifying any confusing language and talking through the implications of each section. You may also choose to have students read and annotate the bill independently first. Then, for a second read, you could have students get with a partner and write the main idea of the document in one sentence. Then, you could discuss the main idea and any confusing sections as a class.

**Hearing preparation (10 minutes):** When students have read and understood the bill, you may pass out the corresponding handouts for students’ roles: committee chairperson script, bill introduction (for bill sponsor), and testimony. Committee members should work to set up the room and then meet to discuss possible questions they may ask of testifiers. The committee chairperson should review the script. The bill sponsor will need to review their introduction. And testifiers should break up into two groups (proponents and opponents) to review and practice the pre-written testimony. If students want to share a testimony, they should assign talking points for each testifier.

**Setting up the classroom:**

* Place seven student desks at the front of the classroom, facing the rest of the room. These desks will represent the committee members. The committee’s chairperson will sit in the middle desk.
* Place a table or student desk facing the committee members. This will be the testifier table. The student senator sponsoring the bill will present the bill introduction from this desk. Proponent and opponent testimony also will be given from the testifier table.
* The remaining students will sit in the “audience” facing the committee members. Testifiers will also sit in the audience when not delivering the testimony

*Phase 3: Assessment, Independent Action (20 minutes)*

**Conducting the hearing:**

* It may be necessary during the hearing process to remind committee members that the purpose of the hearing is to gather public input and to learn from experts in the field in order to better understand the legislation they will be voting on.
* The chairperson should bring the hearing to order, following the script provided. Be sure to remind the student senators that they may speak only when recognized by the chairperson and may ask questions only when each individual’s testimony has concluded.
* Each testifier must introduce themselves in advance of their testimony. They must state and spell their name, as well as indicate their position on the bill. For example, “Hello committee members, my name is Bridget Claborn. B-R-I-D-G-E-T - C-L-A-B-O-R-N. I am here in support of LB 1108.”
* Once testimony has concluded, the bill introducer may offer a closing statement. *There is not a pre-written closing statement for the introducing senator, but you should allow the assigned student the opportunity to speak extemporaneously, encouraging them to say something in summary to persuade the committee to move forward with the bill.*
* After this step, the student senators on the committee will enter “executive session.” Explain to students that in the actual Legislature, executive sessions are closed to the public so that senators may speak freely while wrestling with the difficult aspects of a bill. The media is allowed to attend executive sessions.
* After discussion, the teacher will call a vote of the committee. In executive session, the committee may take the following actions by a majority vote: advance the bill to the full legislature in its current form; advance it with a committee amendment; or take no action, in which case the bill “dies” in committee.

*Wrap-Up, Review and Connections (5-10 minutes)*

You may choose to facilitate a reflective discussion or have students work independently on the to reconsider the essential question: **Why is it important to participate in state government?**

You can use the following questions to guide a conversation or may assign students to write a written response to the essential question and/or one or more of the following:

1. What aspects of the Nebraska Unicameral encourage public participation?
2. Describe what the “Citizen Legislature” means?
3. What aspects of the Unicameral or any part of state government could improve avenues for public participation?
4. To what extent do you consider voting to be participation in state government? In other words, is voting a sufficient form of participation? A necessary one? Should people do more than just vote and why or why not?
5. If you were to describe Nebraska’s state government to your fourth grade self, what would you say?