

# LEARNING ABOUT LEGISLATORS

At a Glance

<b>Time:</b> 45 m	<b>Grade Level:</b> 3–12
<b>Description:</b> An explanation on how the legislative branch works in Georgia. Students will learn about the Georgia General Assembly, the differences between the House of Representatives and the Senate, and the roles that the various leaders play in each chamber, the responsibilities of the Georgia General Assembly, and the ways that voting districts are drawn.	
<b>Standards:</b> SS3G1, SS4CG1, SS4CG3, S8CG2, SSCG15	
<b>Objectives:</b> Participants learn what the legislative branch does. Participants learn the responsibilities of elected officials in the state's legislative branch of government. Participants learn the requirements to run for office as a Senator or Representative in the State of Georgia.	
<b>Supplies:</b> Paper and/or slideshow	
<b>Bibliography:</b> See appendix.	
<b>Essential Questions:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How does the legislative branch serve the people of Georgia?</li><li>2. Why are there so many requirements to run for office?</li><li>3. What are some of the limitations that elected officials in the state legislature face?</li></ol>	

# Sample Script

Today we will talk about Georgia's legislative branch. We will review the Georgia General Assembly's responsibilities, how it works, who works there, and how to run for a seat in the state legislature.

## **Intro discussion:**

**What does the legislative branch do?**

**How do you become a legislator?**

**Are there any restrictions on what kinds of laws state legislators can pass?**

*Option: Watch Georgia's Legislative Branch*

The Georgia General Assembly is divided into two houses: The House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives has 180 members. Each member is elected by the people in their district and serves a two-year term. There are no term limits for legislators in the state of Georgia, so they can serve indefinitely with the support of their district.

Members of the state legislature draw these district lines (along with U.S. House and Senate districts) every ten years. The Legislative and Congressional Reapportionment Committee in the House, and the Reapportionment and Redistricting Committee in the Senate work to draw these district maps. The district maps must earn a majority vote, and the governor can veto the maps. These districts do not have to adhere to municipal or county boundaries. In an ideal situation, districts should reflect the data collected by the federal census.

*Activity 1: Find your Legislators*

Take a moment to find your legislators based on your address. Keep in mind that legislative districts are independent from school districts, city limits, and county lines, so you may have one legislator for your house and another for the school you attend. You will have at least one Senator and one member of the House of Representatives.

*Optional: Identify a problem in your community and write your legislator about that problem*

The Speaker of the House leads the House of Representatives as presiding officer. The House speaker is elected by the members of the House of Representatives and only votes to break ties. The Senate is led by the lieutenant governor. The lieutenant governor is elected statewide and has responsibilities outside of the Senate. Inside the Senate, the lieutenant governor's responsibilities include ensuring that everyone follows the rules, casting tie-breaking votes, and establishing the agenda for each day in session. There are a few other leadership positions in both houses of the General Assembly that we should also address.

***President Pro Tempore:** presides over the Senate when the lieutenant governor is absent.*

***Speaker Pro Tempore:** presides over the House of Representatives when the Speaker is absent.*

***Majority Leader:** elected by the majority party's members. Serves as a spokesperson for the party, is lead speaker for the party during floor debates, helps develop the calendar, schedules business on the floor by calling bills from the calendar.*

***Majority Whip:** responsible for rallying the majority party's votes in favor or against pieces of legislation, assists majority leader, takes over for the majority leader when they are absent.*

***Minority Leader:** elected by the party not in control of the chamber, directs the minority party's strategy, helps assemble party members for important votes, and serves as the party's spokesperson, negotiates with majority party. They are normally the runner up in the speaker's election in the House of Representatives. They may take over as speaker if their party gains control of the House.*

***Minority Whip:** responsible for rallying the party's votes in favor or against pieces of legislation, assists minority leader, takes over for the minority leader when they are absent.*

*Other members of legislative leadership include:*

*Majority Caucus Chair (Senate)*

*Majority Caucus Vice Chair (Senate)*

*Majority Caucus Secretary (Senate)*

*Minority Caucus Chair (Senate)*

*Minority Caucus First Vice Chair (Senate)*

*Minority Caucus Secretary (Senate)*

*Majority Caucus Chairman (House)*

*Majority Caucus Vice-Chairman (House)*

*Majority Caucus Secretary/Treasurer (House)*

*Majority Caucus Chief Deputy Whip (House)*

*Minority Caucus Chairman (House)*

*Minority Caucus Vice-Chairman (House)*

*Minority Caucus Secretary (House)*

*Minority Caucus Treasurer (House)*

*Minority Caucus Chief Deputy Whip (House)*

## *Activity 2: Write your own Rules (discussion)*

Much of legislative leadership is dedicated to ensuring that members follow the rules of procedure. What rules would your class like to establish before a discussion? You can have your teacher preside over the discussion or choose a student. Alternatively, make a list of some of the rules you already obey in class. Why do you follow these rules? What might happen if no one followed the rules?

Legislators are responsible for making the state's laws, but the U.S. and Georgia constitutions limit what state laws can regulate. If the legislature writes a law that violates either constitution, it can be "struck down" by the court system. The tenth amendment of the U.S. constitution states, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people." This means that if an issue—like public education—is not explicitly assigned to the federal government, then state governments can enact laws and regulate that area. Additionally, the state legislature cannot pass any laws that go against the state or federal constitution. These are called "unconstitutional" laws.

<b>STATE GOVERNMENT</b>	<b>FEDERAL GOVERNMENT</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Regulating property laws</li> <li>2. Educating citizens</li> <li>3. Distributing aid (welfare)</li> <li>4. Maintaining state highways and interstates</li> <li>5. Amending the state constitution</li> <li>6. Setting up local governments (counties, towns, and cities)</li> <li>7. Regulating industry</li> <li>8. Establishing taxes</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ratifying treaties</li> <li>2. Issuing money</li> <li>3. Deciding on import and export duties</li> <li>4. Declaring war</li> <li>5. Establishing federal taxes</li> <li>6. Regulating industry</li> </ol>

### Activity 3: Discussion

What are some of the restrictions placed on the state legislature?

**Rule of Supremacy:** the state legislature cannot pass laws that contradict state or federal constitution. The state legislature cannot pass laws that encroach on powers assigned to the U.S. Congress.

**Majority needed:** no law can pass without a simple majority. Some laws require a supermajority.

**Government Approval:** if a governor does not approve of a law, the state legislature must get a two-thirds majority vote to override the veto.

**Voter support:** if state legislators do not have their voters support for the bills they sponsor and vote on, then they may not be legislators for long!



## Take Home Activities: *Available on Word Document*

### Worksheet: *Redistricting*

Students will draw their own electoral districts for Georgia, taking into consideration population, demographics, and other geographic factors. They will provide a brief explanation on what resources you used to determine the boundaries of your district.

*Optional: Have the class vote on which map to approve.*

*Worksheet: State v Federal*

### Worksheet: *State v. Federal*

Students will use a list to identify which laws our state legislature can pass, which ones the U.S. Congress can pass. Which violate the state or federal constitution?

### Essay:

Why are there limitations on who can run as a state representative or senator? Choose one restriction (age, residency) to argue for or against.

### Essay:

Why are there limitations on what laws certain legislators can pass? Choose one power currently assigned to the federal government, and argue for or against it being a power that the state government can regulate.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. **Georgia State Constitution**
2. “**Roles and Responsibilities of Selected Leadership Positions**,” National Council of State Legislators, 2017. <https://www.ncsl.org/legislators-staff/legislators/legislative-leaders/roles-and-responsibilities-of-selected-leadership-positions.aspx>.
3. “**Majority and Minority Leaders**,” United States Senate, 2021. [https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Majority\\_Minority\\_Leaders.htm#:~:text=Depending%20on%20which%20party%20is,govern%20the%20time%20for%20debate](https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Majority_Minority_Leaders.htm#:~:text=Depending%20on%20which%20party%20is,govern%20the%20time%20for%20debate).
4. “**Georgia**,” *Princeton Gerrymandering Project*, Princeton University. <https://gerrymander.princeton.edu/reforms/GA>. Interactive Constitution <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendment/amendment-x>.