

Reader's Theater  
**How a Bill Becomes a Law**

*For six individual readers*

Adapted from iCivics <http://www.icivics.org/>

**Voice 1:** Our United States government has three branches. That's because the writers of our Constitution did not want one person or one branch of the government to become too powerful. They knew what life was like under the British king, King George, who had all the power.

**Voice 2:** So, our branches share the power to make important decisions. The three branches are:

**Whole group:** Legislative, executive, and judicial.

**Voice 1:** It's the legislative branch, or Congress, that makes our laws.

**Whole group:** Yes, the legislative branch makes our laws. That's Congress!

**Voice 3:** Congress has two houses, or chambers; those two houses are the House of Representatives and the Senate.

**Whole group:** The House of Representatives and the Senate.

**Voice 4:** It's the job of both the House and the Senate to decide on any new laws for our country, because both houses of Congress must approve all new laws.

**Whole group:** Both houses of Congress!

**Voice 1:** What if you have an idea for a new law? What is the process to get that new law in place?

**Voice 2:** Do you mean something like a law about flooding or other natural disasters? Can't people just go to Congress and ask for a new law?

**Voice 3:** No, because only a Representative or Senator can begin the process of making a new law for our country.

**Whole group:** That's right! Only a Representative or Senator can start the process to make a new law for our country.

**Voice 3:** But if you have a great idea, you can suggest a new law to your Representative or Senator.

**Voice 2:** What if the President has an idea for a new law?

**Voice 4:** The President has to suggest his idea to a member of Congress, too!

**Whole group:** The President must suggest his idea to a member of Congress, too.

**Voice 4:** The first thing that a Senator or Representative must do is write down the idea for a law, and that is called a bill. It's like a rough draft of a law.

**Whole group:** Before a law is a law, it's a bill. It's not easy being a bill!

**Voice 6:** That's right; it's not easy being a bill because there are many steps in the process before a bill becomes a law!

**Voice 5:** To begin: A Representative introduces his bill to the House.

**Voice 6:** And a Senator introduces his bill to the Senate.

**Voice 4:** And then there's a vote, right?

**Voice 1:** Not yet. You introduce your bill to your chamber of Congress and the process begins.

**Voice 2:** You tell your chamber of Congress why you think your idea is a good one, and why your bill should become a law. For example, you might propose a law to help citizens recover after a natural disaster, such as severe flooding. After all, all parts of the country deal with flooding.

**Voices 5 & 6:** Then because your bill is so wonderful and everyone loves it, the Senators or Representatives will immediately vote to make it a law!

**Voice 2:** Not exactly!

**Whole group:** Not exactly?

**Voice 4:** Well, why not?

**Whole group:** Yeah, why not?

**Voice 1:** There are many steps along the way before your bill is voted on. First, the law is given a number such as HR 123 or S 123.

**Whole group:** A number!

**Voice 1:** And then given to a committee, and if they vote yes, the bill goes to a vote in the chamber of Congress where the bill started.

**Voice 6:** After the committee says they like it, and they send it to the entire chamber, then the chamber of Congress votes and the bill is finally a law, correct?

**Voice 1:** No, remember, it's not easy being a bill! Even when your chamber of Congress votes in favor of the bill, it's still not a law.

**Whole group:** It's not easy being a bill!

**Voice 4:** If the House or Senate votes for the bill, why isn't it a law now?

**Voice 3:** Both chambers must pass the bill!

**Whole group:** Both chambers must pass the bill! It's not easy being a bill!

**Voice 1:** So, if the Senate passes the bill, it will go next to the House of Representatives for a vote.

**Voice 2:** Or, if the House passes the bill, it will go next to the Senate for a vote.

**Voices 5 & 6:** So, finally, when both houses have passed the bill, then it's a law, right? This is a long process! It's not easy being a bill.

**Whole group:** It's not easy being a bill!

**Voice 2:** What's next then?

**Voice 1:** In order for the bill to become a law, the President must sign it.

**Voice 2:** That sounds simple enough! The President just signs the bill and it's a law!

**Voice 1:** It is simple if the President likes your bill! Then he will sign it. If he doesn't, he'll veto, or reject it.

**Voices 5 & 6:** All that work for nothing?

**Whole group:** Yes, all that work for nothing?

**Voice 3:** Congress can vote again, and the bill can become a law with 2/3 voting in favor.

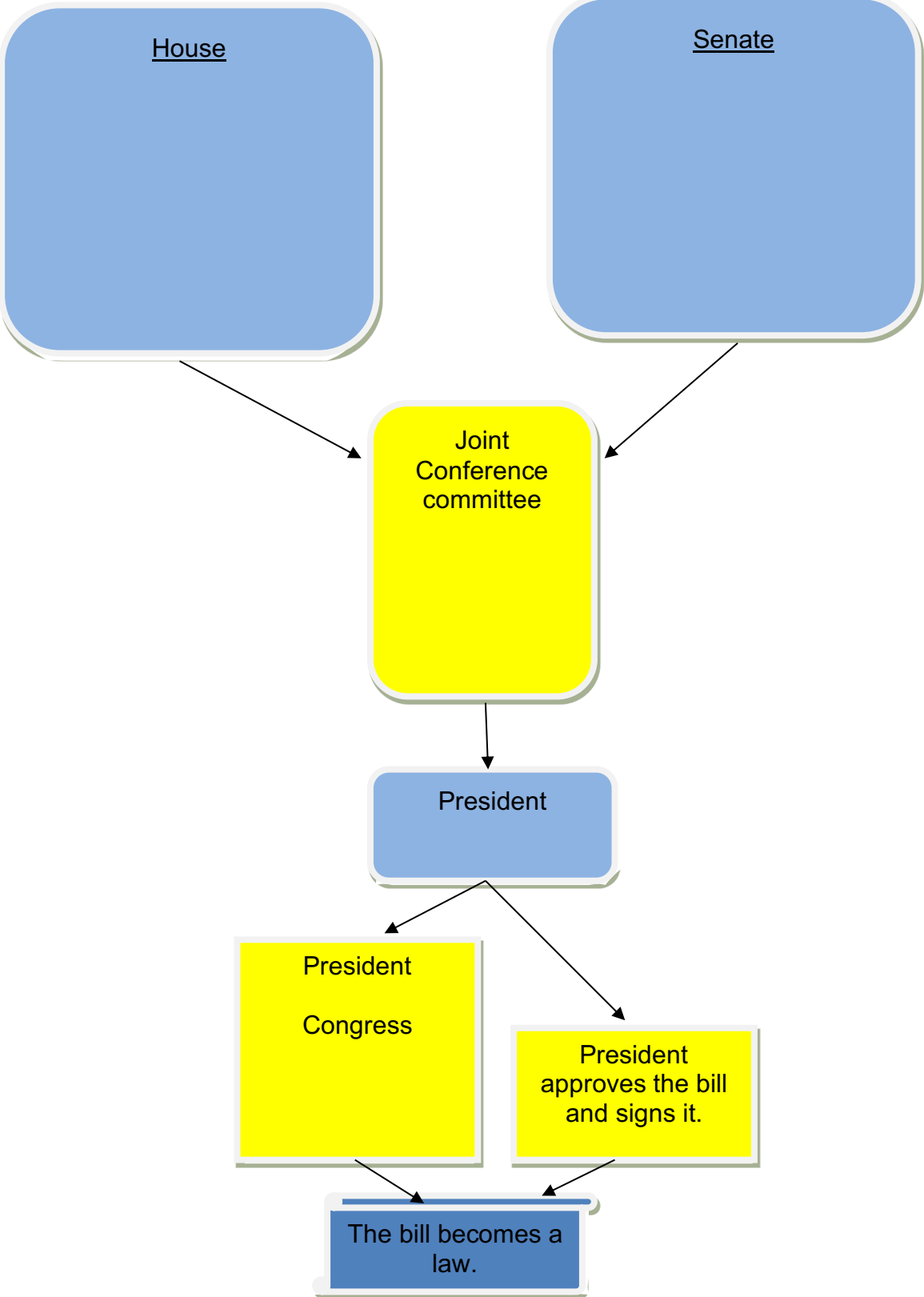
**Voice 4:** And then it becomes a law whether or not the President likes it!

**Whole group:** Hooray! It becomes a law then! It's certainly not easy being a bill.

**Voice 1:** It's not easy for a bill to become a law!

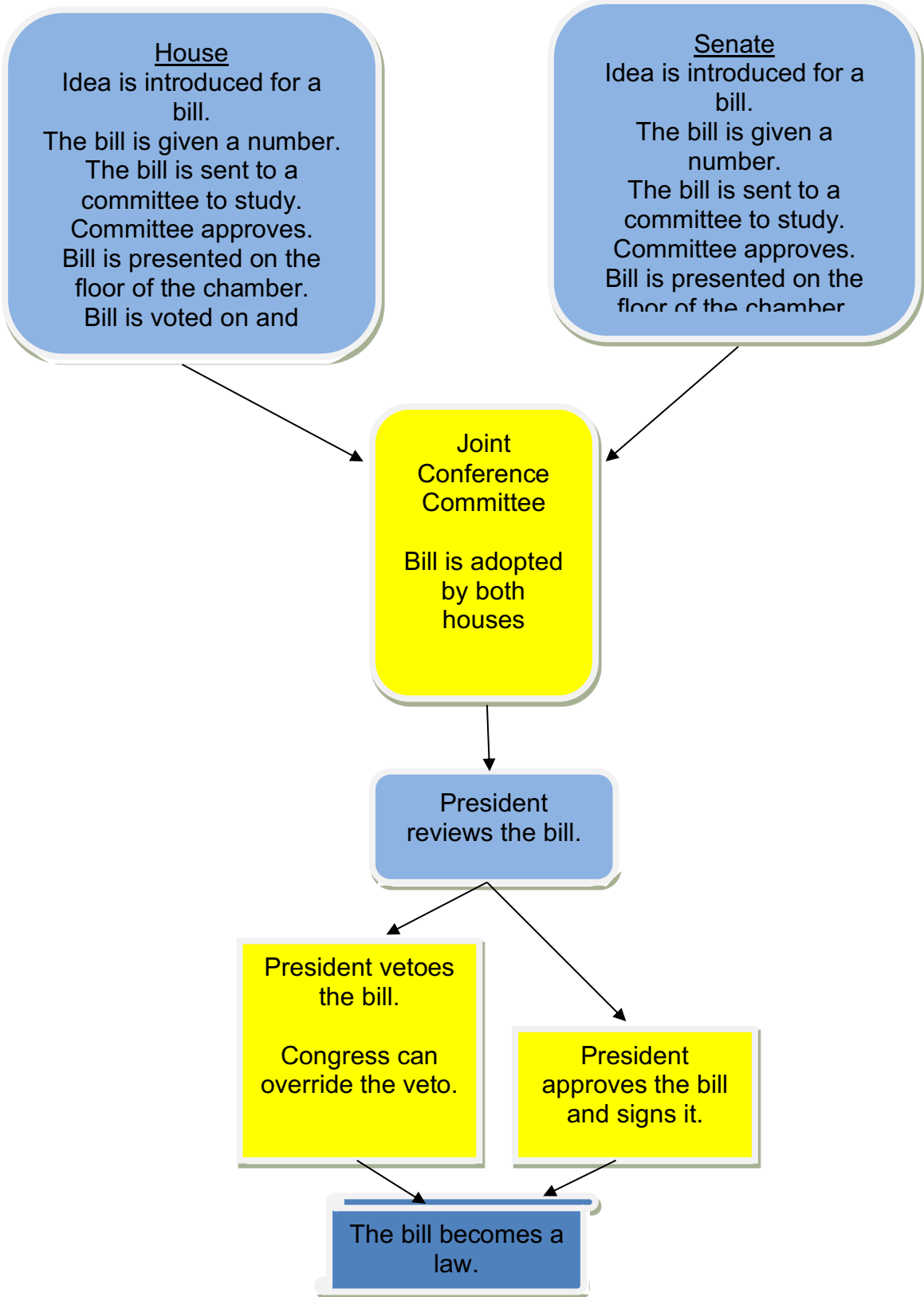
**Whole group:** That's right!

Flow Chart: **How a Bill Becomes a Law**



# Flow Chart: How a Bill Becomes a Law

## Answer Key



## Multiple Choice Quiz: How a Bill Becomes a Law

1. Who may introduce a bill to Congress?
  - a. any citizen over the age of 21
  - b. only a member of either chamber of Congress
  - c. only a Senator
  - d. only a Representative
2. Which one is not part of the process of a bill becoming a law?
  - a. It is introduced by the member of Congress who is presenting the bill in his/her side of Congress.
  - b. The President reads it first.
  - c. It is given a number such as HR 123 or S 123.
  - d. It is given to a committee.
3. After the committee in one house votes in favor of the bill, the bill
  - a. goes to the other house.
  - b. is dead.
  - c. goes to the President to sign.
  - d. goes to the full house for a vote.
4. In order for a bill to become law,
  - a. it must go to a second committee in the same chamber.
  - b. it goes to a special Presidential committee.
  - c. it must pass a vote in both houses of Congress.
  - d. it must pass a vote in the Supreme Court.
5. Where does the bill go after it passes both houses of Congress?
  - a. to the President to sign or veto
  - b. to the Supreme Court to vote on
  - c. to the Joint Conference Committee
  - d. to the states to vote on
6. Eventually, all bills from Congress must be acted on by the President. If the President vetoes the bill, what must happen so that the bill becomes a law?
  - a. The bill must be voted on and passed by two-thirds of those present in each chamber, and then it becomes a law.
  - b. The Supreme Court must pass the bill.
  - c. The states must pass the bill with a two-thirds vote.
  - d. The citizens must pass the bill with a majority vote.

## Answer Key

## How a Bill Becomes a Law

1. B
2. B
3. D
4. C
5. A
6. A

## Floods Can Affect Humans and their Environment

**Floods** can be very deadly. People on Earth need to be concerned about flooding. Floods are the most common hazard in the United States. More people die as a result of flooding than any other disaster. Floods can lead to loss of homes, ruined food supply, and disease. Floods can have a long lasting effect on how people go about their daily lives.

Most people who experience floods live near rivers or coastal areas. Storms can cause flooding due to heavy rainfall causing rivers to overflow their banks. This can destroy farm land and homes along with towns and cities. Climate change can also have an effect on raising the level of the ocean. This might make flooding more likely in low-lying areas near the ocean.

**Flash floods** are perhaps the most deadly of all floods. They can occur in mountain areas, small streams, desert washes, or the middle of large cities. They can sweep bridges, boulders, cars, and buildings along with their roaring water. Giant walls of water can wipe out entire areas in minutes.

Because the hard, dry desert soil absorbs very little rain; flash floods are common in the desert after a sudden downpour. A flash flood *watch* is issued when flash flooding is possible. It tells you to be alert and to stay tuned for further updates. A flash flood *warning* is issued when a flash flood is actually happening. It means that people in these areas must act immediately to save themselves. They may have only minutes to move to higher ground to escape the approaching waters.

When flooding is over, affected areas are sometimes covered mud. The water and land can be contaminated with hazardous materials, such as sharp debris, pesticides, fuel, mold, and sewage. People living in the flooded areas can be left without power and water, making it hard for them to clean their homes of trash from the flood. The polluted flood water can also cause fatal diseases such as cholera. And animals that have fled their homes will also seek safety on higher ground. These animals can include pets as well as deer, snakes, and rats all trying to share the same space with the humans.

How can the government help people who live in places that flood?

### Writing Assignment

**You are a Congressperson, and you are concerned about the flooding problem in the United States. You want to get a bill introduced into Congress.**

1. In your essay (minimum of three paragraphs), explain the bill that you propose to help the people of the United States with their flooding problems.
2. Make sure to consider facts about flooding and how people are affected. Consider all of the issues in the reading above. Remember to state clearly what you are proposing as a new bill in Congress



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Writing Assignment Scoring Guide

Assignment Traits	←				
	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Accuracy</b> How correct is your information about flooding? Is it fully supported by evidence of real flooding events?					
	<u>Comments:</u>				
<b>Organization</b> Did you begin your assignment explaining why this bill is necessary? Did you include facts in your writing to convince the reader that this bill is necessary? Did you clearly state how your proposed bill would help when floods occur? Did you have a convincing conclusion?					
	<u>Comments:</u>				
<b>Focus</b> Did you keep to assigned format? Did you state your case by using the appropriate terms from information you learned in the lesson? Did you have at least three paragraphs?					
	<u>Comments:</u>				
<b>Conventions</b> Did your writing contain a minimal amount of mechanical errors?					
	<u>Comments:</u>				

- Assessment guide  
5 = Exceptional  
4 = Effective  
3 = Developing  
2 = Emerging  
1 = Not Yet