Who Shapes a Bill?

Follow a proposal through Congress and identify who can change its course.

SS24.USG.4 "Describe the role and responsibilities of the legislative branch, including the process of lawmaking, the power of the purse, and the system of checks and balances within Congress..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline actions that move the bill toward law, circle leaders or committees that shape it, and put a star beside each check on another actor's power.

A Bill for Safer Water

1. After residents report lead in school drinking water, a representative proposes federal grants for pipe replacement. Congress can write national laws, investigate agencies, and control spending through appropriations, the power of the purse. The House and Senate must agree on a bill, so neither chamber can make this law alone. In the House, the Speaker presides and helps set the agenda. In the Senate, the president pro tempore presides when the vice president is absent, though other senators often fill the chair. In each chamber, majority and minority leaders guide their parties' strategies; party whips count votes and rally members.

2. The proposal goes to a standing committee, a permanent group specializing in issues such as public health. Members can hold hearings, revise the text, and vote on whether to send it to the full chamber. A select committee, created for a particular investigation or task, might study why water systems failed; a joint committee draws members from both chambers to examine shared concerns. If House and Senate versions differ, a conference committee of members from both chambers may negotiate one compromise. These committees shape policy by gathering evidence, drafting changes, and deciding which proposals advance, although conference agreements still require approval in both chambers.

3. A House member introduces the water bill, and committee review follows. During hearings and beyond, lobbyists for parent groups or water utilities may contact lawmakers, offer research, and urge changes; they cannot cast votes. If the committee advances the bill, the House debates and votes. The Senate reviews its version in committee, debates, and votes too. If the chambers pass different texts, they must agree on identical wording and vote on any conference compromise. The president can sign the bill or veto it. Congress can override a veto with a two-thirds vote in each chamber. If enacted, Congress can later oversee how agencies use the funds.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Compare the Speaker's role with the president pro tempore's role. How do party whips differ from majority and minority leaders?

2. How does a standing committee's role differ from a select or joint committee's role? When might a conference committee enter this bill's path?

3. Trace the bill from introduction through presidential action. Include where lobbyists can weigh in and what happens if the chambers pass different texts.

4. How do the power of the purse and the need for agreement between chambers limit control over the water grants? What can Congress do after a presidential veto?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine Congress considers a federal grant to install air filters in public school classrooms. In one paragraph, explain how congressional leaders and two types of committees could shape the bill, where lobbyists might weigh in, how it could become law, and how Congress could check the use of its funding afterward.

ANSWER KEY

Who Shapes a Bill?

GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline actions that move the bill toward law, circle leaders or committees that shape it, and put a star beside each check on another actor's power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Compare the Speaker's role with the president pro tempore's role. How do party whips differ from majority and minority leaders?	**The Speaker presides over the House and helps set its agenda. The president pro tempore presides over the Senate when the vice president is absent. Majority and minority leaders guide party strategy, while whips count votes and rally members.**
2	How does a standing committee's role differ from a select or joint committee's role? When might a conference committee enter this bill's path?	**A standing committee reviews and can revise the bill. A select committee might investigate water-system failures, while a joint committee examines concerns shared by both chambers. A conference committee may negotiate a compromise if the chambers pass different versions.**
3	Trace the bill from introduction through presidential action. Include where lobbyists can weigh in and what happens if the chambers pass different texts.	**A House member introduces the bill. A committee reviews it, while lobbyists may offer research and urge changes. The House and Senate debate and vote. If their texts differ, they agree on identical wording and vote on any conference compromise. The president then signs or vetoes the bill.**
4	How do the power of the purse and the need for agreement between chambers limit control over the water grants? What can Congress do after a presidential veto?	**Congress controls funding through appropriations, and neither chamber can enact its preferred version alone. After a veto, Congress can override it with a two-thirds vote in each chamber.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

After wildfire smoke closes classrooms, a representative introduces a bill funding school air filters. A House standing committee hears nurses and revises grant rules; lobbyists for districts and filter companies urge different eligibility standards. The Speaker helps bring the bill to the House floor, while party whips count support before the vote. A Senate standing committee changes the funding formula, and the Senate passes its version. A conference committee negotiates one text, which both chambers approve. The president signs it. Through appropriations, Congress controls how much money is available, and oversight hearings can question whether the responsible agency spends the grants as authorized.

Accept other accurate leaders, committees, or lobbyist actions in the open response. A conference committee is needed only if the chambers pass different versions.