Two Chambers, Different Voices

Compare who serves in the House and Senate.

USG.C.4.1.A "Compare the composition of the United States of America House to the United States of America Senate."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline facts that show how seats are assigned in each chamber, circle descriptions of who elects each member, and write 1 beside the House term length and 2 beside the Senate term length.

Who Represents a State?

1. Imagine two states with very different populations sending lawmakers to Washington. The House of Representatives has 435 voting seats, with each state's share based on population. A state with more residents generally receives more seats than one with fewer residents, though every state gets at least one. House seats are reassigned among states after each ten-year census, but the total remains fixed by law at 435. The Senate works differently: each of the 50 states has two Senate seats, for 100 seats total. A state's population can change without changing its two Senate seats.

2. House members are elected by voters in congressional districts, which divide most states into smaller areas. A state with only one House seat forms a single statewide district. Senators are elected by voters across their entire state, not by separate districts. These different electorates shape whose concerns each member hears most directly. The Constitution also sets different minimum qualifications: a House member must be at least 25 years old and a U.S. citizen for at least seven years; a senator must be at least 30 and a citizen for at least nine years. Both must be inhabitants of the state they represent when elected.

3. The chambers also differ in how often their members face voters. Every House seat is up for election every two years, so voters can replace the entire House in one election. Senators serve six-year terms, and their terms are staggered so roughly one-third of Senate seats are up every two years. Voters therefore cannot replace the entire Senate in a single regular election. Picture a sudden debate over a new highway: every House district can choose a representative at the next regular congressional election, while only states with Senate seats on that election's schedule can choose a senator then.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the chambers differ in their number of seats and in how those seats are distributed among states?

2. In a state with several House districts, who elects a House member, and who elects a senator?

3. Compare the minimum age and citizenship requirements for serving in each chamber.

4. How do term lengths and election schedules affect how much of each chamber voters can replace in one regular election?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A growing state is debating a new rail line, and residents of one district disagree with voters elsewhere in the state. In four sentences, explain how its House and Senate members might hear different views and how population growth could change the state's representation after a future census.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.4.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline facts that show how seats are assigned in each chamber, circle descriptions of who elects each member, and write 1 beside the House term length and 2 beside the Senate term length. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the chambers differ in their number of seats and in how those seats are distributed among states?	**The House has 435 voting seats distributed by state population. The Senate has 100 seats, two for each state.**
2	In a state with several House districts, who elects a House member, and who elects a senator?	**Voters in one district elect their House member; voters across the state elect each senator.**
3	Compare the minimum age and citizenship requirements for serving in each chamber.	**House members must be at least 25 and have been U.S. citizens for seven years. Senators must be at least 30 and have been U.S. citizens for nine years.**
4	How do term lengths and election schedules affect how much of each chamber voters can replace in one regular election?	**All House seats are up every two years. Senators serve six-year terms, with roughly one-third of Senate seats up every two years.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A House member from the district that opposes the rail line may hear strong objections from local voters. The state's two senators answer to voters across the whole state, including people who favor the project. After a future census, the growing state might gain a House seat if its population rises relative to other states. It would still have two Senate seats because every state has the same number.

Accept either position on the rail line for the district. The response should distinguish district and statewide voters, treat a House seat gain as possible rather than certain, and keep the state's Senate seats at two.