Two Chambers, One Congress

Why the Framers divided legislative power

USG.C.4.1.C "Explain why the Framers established a bicameral legislative body and how the House of Representatives functions differently from the Senate."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two reasons the Framers created two chambers. Circle one power unique to each chamber, and box the words that show how the chambers must work together to pass a law.

Why Congress Has Two Chambers

1. In 1787, delegates at the Constitutional Convention faced a problem: How could states with very different populations share power in Congress? Delegates from large states wanted seats based on population; delegates from small states feared being outvoted. The Great Compromise created two chambers, or houses, instead of one. Seats in the House of Representatives would reflect each state's population, while each state would have equal representation in the Senate. This arrangement gave people in larger states more representatives without letting those states dominate both chambers. Two chambers also meant a proposed law would face debate and a vote in two different groups.

2. Imagine Congress considering a bill to improve roads after severe floods. Members of the House represent districts within states, and voters choose them every two years. States with larger populations have more House seats, but each state has at least one. Frequent elections can make House members especially sensitive to changes in local opinion. A road bill that does not raise revenue may begin in either chamber, but a bill to raise money through taxes must begin in the House. The House also has the sole power to impeach, or formally charge, a federal official. That charge does not itself remove the official from office.

3. Voters in each state elect two senators, regardless of population. Senators serve six-year terms, with elections staggered so only about one-third of Senate seats are up for election every two years. Longer terms can give senators more time to consider long-term effects. The Senate alone holds impeachment trials and votes on whether to convict; it also votes on presidential nominations for top federal offices and on treaties. For a road bill to become law, the House and Senate must approve the same wording before it goes to the president. Neither chamber can pass an ordinary federal law by itself.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did the Great Compromise give House seats based on population but give every state equal representation in the Senate?

2. How might the House and Senate approach a long-term road project differently because of their election schedules?

3. If a federal official is accused of misconduct, how do the House's and Senate's roles differ?

4. Why can neither chamber pass its own version of the road bill as a law?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Design a two-chamber student council. In five or six sentences, explain why one chamber should have seats based on grade enrollment while the other gives each grade equal seats, and describe a different job for each chamber as they consider one realistic school proposal.

ANSWER KEY

Two Chambers, One Congress

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.4.1.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two reasons the Framers created two chambers. Circle one power unique to each chamber, and box the words that show how the chambers must work together to pass a law. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did the Great Compromise give House seats based on population but give every state equal representation in the Senate?	**It gave larger states more House seats while protecting smaller states from being outvoted in both chambers.**
2	How might the House and Senate approach a long-term road project differently because of their election schedules?	**House members face voters every two years and may respond quickly to local opinion. Senators serve staggered six-year terms, giving them more time to consider long-term effects.**
3	If a federal official is accused of misconduct, how do the House's and Senate's roles differ?	**The House may impeach, or formally charge, the official. The Senate holds a trial and votes on whether to convict.**
4	Why can neither chamber pass its own version of the road bill as a law?	**The House and Senate must approve the same wording before the bill goes to the president.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our council should use two chambers to keep the largest grade from deciding everything alone. One chamber should have seats based on enrollment, so grades with more students have more representatives. The other should give each grade the same number of seats, so smaller grades cannot be ignored. For a proposal to extend lunch, the enrollment chamber could collect student surveys. The equal-grade chamber could check whether the plan works for every grade. Both chambers should agree on the same plan before sending it to the principal.

Accept responses that explain both population-based and equal representation, give the chambers distinct roles in a specific proposal, and require them to agree. Student council procedures may differ from Congress if the comparison remains accurate.