

## Making the Law (A) – A Bill's Progress

**NB** This is one of a series of lessons on the political system in Britain. As such, it ties in with the work on democracy and may be better covered when the class is considering that section of the material.

### Aim

To understand how laws are passed by Parliament.

### Learning outcomes

Pupils should be taught to:

- talk and write about their opinions, and explain their views, on issues that affect themselves and society;
- research, discuss and debate topical issues, problems and events;
- understand how rules and laws are made and enforced;
- understand what democracy is, and about the basic institutions that support it locally and nationally.

### Resources

- Prompt sheet, *How Laws are Made*.
- Prompt sheet, *The 11 Stages of a Bill's Passage through Parliament*.
- Activity sheet, *A Bill's Progress*.

### Duration

- 35–45 minutes (and the same again if the homework suggestion is adopted).

### Background

- Give an introductory talk about what laws are and how they are made using some of the information below.

### TEACHER GUIDANCE

#### How Laws are Made

Explain the following in a short talk, prior to the children's completion of the activity sheet, *A Bill's Progress*.

Laws are rules which are passed by Parliament. They are referred to as bills at the time when they are drawn up and when they are being discussed in Parliament.

When passed, they are known as Acts of Parliament or, more commonly, laws.

Sometimes, bills are meant to:

- 'tidy up' laws which already exist;
- introduce changes which government ministers think are important;
- deal with new problems and difficulties as they arise.

#### How Bills Become Laws

Before any bill passes through Parliament, preliminary work will have been done.

There will be discussions with individuals and groups who are directly affected by the proposal. For instance, if the bill is about road safety, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents will be interested; so will be the AA, the RAC and the police.

Sometimes the Government produces:

- a Green Paper outlining possible solutions to the problems it seeks to remedy;

- a White Paper providing more specific proposals which are to be implemented.

Before the bill is published in its final form, ministers will therefore have a good idea of how their own ideas will be received.

### **Procedure in Parliament**

Most of the time of the House of Commons is taken up in talking about bills proposed by the Government. Laws are passed through Parliament in eleven stages. Five take place in the House of Commons, and five in the House of Lords; finally, the bill needs the Royal Assent from the King or Queen. The debates in the Commons are the most important stage.

**NB** The 11 stages are listed on the accompanying sheet and can be displayed, if necessary.

### **Activity**

- Distribute the prompt sheets, *How Laws are Made* and *The 11 Stages of a Bill's Passage Through Parliament* and the activity sheet, *A Bill's Progress*.
- Read through the prompt sheets first and then ask the children to work in pairs to answer the questions on the activity sheet, *A Bill's Progress*.
- In a plenary session, ask the children to put forward their suggestions for laws which they would like to see introduced. Then highlight the benefits and difficulties of having such laws.

### **Teaching and learning suggestions**

- In groups, children decide on a chairperson and vote for a bill; or the teacher prepares bills. Write out the bill in a short paragraph and read it aloud. *Second reading*: ask the children talk about different groups that will be affected by the bill and reword it if necessary or make any improvements. *Committee stage*: ask two or three members of the group to swap with another group to gain opinions and make revisions.

## Making the Law(A)

### How Laws are Made – A Bill's Progress

Prompt Sheet



1. The idea of a bill is dreamed up.  
The Government wins the election and wants to pass several bills.



2. A bill is born.  
A Government Minister plans and guides each bill.



3. People say what the bill should be like.  
The Government Minister and his advisers talk to people who know about the subject; they listen to suggestions.



**4.** The bill is given shape.  
The actual bill is carefully written.  
It must be clear.



**5.** The bill travels through Parliament.  
The bill passes through Parliament  
(the House of Commons and the  
House of Lords).



**6.** The Queen signs the bill. Once  
Parliament has passed the bill, it is  
signed by the Queen (the Royal Assent).  
It is now known as an Act of  
Parliament.

**7.** The bill becomes Law.  
The bill is now the law of the land.

# Making the Law (A)

## The 11 Stages of a Bill's Passage through Parliament

Prompt Sheet

### House of Commons

1. Introduction and First Reading: no debate, just a first chance to see the bill.
2. Second Reading: a discussion of the underlying ideas of the bill.
3. Committee Stage: a committee examines the bill in detail and makes suggestions on how to improve it (amendments).
4. Report Stage: the amended bill is 'reported back' to the whole House.
5. Third Reading: a debate on the bill in its final form.

### House of Lords

The same five stages, in the same order, are repeated in the House of Lords. If there are no changes, the bill only has to receive Royal Assent. If the House of Lords changes the bill, there is discussion with the House of Commons until agreement is reached. Normally, the House of Lords backs down.

### Royal Assent

Today, the monarch never refuses to sign the bill.

# Making the Law (A)

## A Bill's Progress

Activity Sheet

### Task One

#### Fill in the blanks.

A bill has to pass through several stages before it becomes an \_\_\_\_\_. It begins its life as an idea, but before it is given a definite shape a Government \_\_\_\_\_ will have many discussions with people who know about the \_\_\_\_\_. Once the bill has been drawn up, it has to be passed by \_\_\_\_\_. It does not become an Act until it receives the \_\_\_\_\_ Assent. Then it becomes part of the law of the \_\_\_\_\_. At any time, there are many laws which are in force.

### Task Two

The list below shows you how a bill becomes an Act of Parliament or law. Put the list in the right order. Write 1 next to the statement which you think comes first.

- The bill is produced in its final form before it goes to Parliament. \_\_\_\_\_
- A Government Minister looks after the progress of the bill. \_\_\_\_\_
- Someone has the idea of a bill. \_\_\_\_\_
- The Government Minister and his advisers talk to people who might have helpful ideas about what should be in the bill. \_\_\_\_\_
- The Queen gives the Royal Assent. \_\_\_\_\_
- The bill passes through Parliament. \_\_\_\_\_

### Task Three

Can you think of a law which you would like to introduce on any subject?

For instance, you might want to:

- stop smoking in all cafés and restaurants;
- ban dogs from public parks.

Whatever bill you choose, say why you would like to see it introduced.

Write in the space below:

My idea should be introduced because:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_