

What Congress Does and Why it Matters

Worksheet 1: Studying the Diagram

1. What is the topic of this diagram, and how is it organized to express it?
2. Give examples of how Congress does each of the four major actions shown on the diagram.
 - a. Legislates:
 - b. Exercises powers granted in the Constitution:
 - c. Represents constituents:
 - d. Balances powers within Congress itself and between branches:
3. In which of the four major actions does Congress interact with other parts of the government?
4. Which of the four major actions does the public know the least about? Why?
5. Which of the four major actions should the public to understand better? Why?

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Worksheet 2: Analyzing One Quadrant of the Diagram

1. How do members of Congress act as representatives of particular groups of constituents when they do the actions detailed in this quadrant of the diagram?
2. How does the Senate or House act for the American people in general when either does the action detailed in this quadrant of the diagram?
3. How does the House or Senate demonstrate the principle of the separation of powers when it conducts the actions detailed in this quadrant of the diagram?
4. How do the actions detailed in this quadrant demonstrate balance between branches of government?

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Worksheet 4: Reflection Questions

Draw upon what you have learned in completing the preceding steps of this lesson to address the following items. Consider the following hypothetical situations and identify the best way for a member of Congress to act in each case. Be ready to justify your choice with evidence.

1. You are a newly elected member of the House of Representatives and a member of the party holding a minority of the seats in the chamber. What activities in the diagram should you focus on to build your influence in Congress?
2. You are a veteran member of the majority party in the House of Representatives who aspires to achieve a leadership position within the party. What activities in the diagram should you concentrate on?
3. You are a senior Senator of the majority party who aspires to run for President of the United States. What activities in the diagram would be the most beneficial to you?
4. Congress provides the American people with a different type of representation than the President. In what ways is it fair to call Congress the “people’s branch” of government?
5. It is typical to think of the President as the leading actor in national affairs. In what circumstances is it appropriate for Congress to take the lead in national affairs?