

Clean Water Act

Mini-Lesson



Clean Water Act – Senate Debate Overriding a Presidential Veto

Mini-Lesson Teacher Materials

Grade Level

9-12, U.S. Government and Civics,
United States History and
Geography

Standards

GC.06, 13, 16

US.85,

TN.61

AP HuG IMP – 1.C

*AP Gov PMI-1, CON – 3.B.3, CON –
4.A.2*

APUSH KC-8.2.II.D

AP World Unit 8: LO.C

Objectives/Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to identify the reasons a president might veto legislation and the process by which Congress can override that veto.

Time Needed

45 Minutes

Key Terms and People

Veto, Congressional Override, Bill, Checks and Balances, Senator Edmund Muskie, Senator Howard H. Baker, Jr., President Richard Nixon



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Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students explore the process by which the legislative branch can override a presidential veto in the United States. Students then learn the specific steps required to override a veto, including the two-thirds majority vote needed in both chambers of Congress. Finally, students will consider why a U.S. president might veto a bill and determine when to override by taking a position on a debate. Students will take a position on President Richard Nixon's 1972 veto of the popular, bipartisan Clean Water Act and explain their reasoning in writing.

Standards and Guidelines Alignment		
Tennessee State Standards		
U.S. Government and Civics	GC.06	Describe limited government within the Constitution, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checks and balances • Separation of powers
	GC.13	Describe the process of how a bill becomes a law.
	GC.16	Analyze Article II of the Constitution as it relates to the executive branch, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Powers of the president
Tennessee History	TN.61	Identify the contributions of influential Tennesseans of the era, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Howard Baker
United States History and Geography	US.85	Explain significant achievements of President Richard Nixon’s administration, including his appeal to the “silent majority” and his major foreign policy actions.
AP Course Alignment		
AP Human Geography	IMP-1.C	Explain the geographical effects of decisions made using geographical information.
AP United States Government and Politics	PMI-1	The Constitution created a competitive policy-making process to ensure the people’s will is represented and that freedom is preserved.

	<p>CON-3.B.3</p>	<p>Explain how the structure, powers, and functions of both houses of Congress affect the policy-making process. Chamber-specific procedures, rules, and roles that impact the policy-making process include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of chamber and debate rules that set the bar high for building majority support <p>Roles of Speaker of the House, President of the Senate, party leadership, and committee leadership in both chambers</p>
	<p>CON-4.A.2</p>	<p>Formal and informal powers of the president include: Vetoes and pocket vetoes—formal powers that enable the president to check Congress</p>
<p>AP United States History</p>	<p>KC-8.2.II.D</p>	<p>Environmental problems and accidents led to a growing environmental movement that aimed to use legislative and public efforts to combat pollution and protect natural resources. The federal government established new environmental programs and regulations.</p>
<p>AP World History</p>	<p>Unit 8: LO.C</p>	<p>Explain the extent to which the effects of the Cold War were similar in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.</p>
<p>IAC Guidelines</p>		
<p>Topic 3: The Institutions of the United States Government</p>	<p>IAC.T3.2</p>	<p>Identifying how the three branches work together to form a system of checks and balances.</p>

**Activating
Strategy**
5 Minutes

Ask students, “*What do you know about the Environmental Protection Agency and the Clean Water Act?*”

Students may mention that President Richard Nixon created the EPA. Help students recognize that the EPA creates regulations that businesses and industry must follow to protect the environment. They may mention that the Clean Water Act specifically provides funding to improve the quality of the country’s waterways.

Begin the activity by reading the “Background Information” section or having a student read it aloud:

The Clean Water Act, passed in 1972, was a landmark piece of legislation in the United States aimed at regulating and improving the quality of the nation's waterways. Its primary goal was to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the country's waters.

Howard H. Baker, Jr., a Republican Senator from Tennessee, played a significant role in the Act's passage by helping to negotiate a bipartisan compromise. He worked alongside Senator Edmund Muskie, a Democrat, to merge competing bills into a comprehensive piece of legislation that garnered widespread support. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Baker's bipartisan efforts were instrumental in overcoming political obstacles and achieving the Act's passage over President Richard Nixon’s veto. (“Clean Water Act,” EPA)

Say, “*Today, we are looking at how the Clean Water Act was passed and why it was controversial. We are going to learn how bills are passed by recreating the Senate debate.*”

Instruction
30 Minutes

Instruct students for this lesson they will imagine that they are United States Senators preparing for a meeting with the co-sponsors of the bill, Edmund Muskie and Howard H. Baker, Jr. Muskie and Baker are trying to secure their votes to override President Nixon's veto, and they will have to explain why they are or are not going to vote to override this veto. First, they should read the viewpoints on **Handout A** tell them that after they finish reading, they should work on the **Skill Sheet** to prepare for their meeting. Students should prepare as if they will have three minutes to explain their position.

Closing
Argument
10 Minutes

With the entire class, ask students to discuss with a peer and then share their answers to the following questions:

Why might a president veto a popular bill?

How does Congress override a presidential veto?

Why is it important for senators to communicate their positions clearly when debating a bill?

Why might senators from different parties set differences aside and collaborate?

KEY TERMS & PEOPLE*

Veto - The power of the chief executive to nullify acts of the legislature.

Congressional Override - Congress can override a president's veto of a bill by passing the act by a two-thirds vote in both the House and the Senate.

Bill - A proposal for a new law, or a proposal to significantly change an existing law

Checks and Balances - Fundamental principle underlying the American constitutional system, whereby institutions of government can check one another in order to prevent one branch from becoming too powerful.

Senator Edmund Muskie - U.S. Senator (D-Maine) 1959-1980.

President Richard M. Nixon - 37th president of the United States of America, elected in 1968.

Resources

Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1251 (Oct. 18, 1972).

Environmental Protection Agency, and Jack Corn. "Coal Barges Tied up on the Cumberland River Waiting to Be Unloaded." July 1974. Photograph.

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Simon, Ellen. "The Bipartisan Beginnings of the Clean Water Act." The Waterkeeper Alliance. <https://waterkeeper.org/news/bipartisan-beginnings-of-clean-water-act/>.

White House Historical Association. "Richard M. Nixon: The 37th President of the United States." *WhiteHouse.gov*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/richard-m-nixon/>.



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