

First Congress Unit - Lesson 1: Rules of Debate

Rules of Debate: Simplified Parliamentary Procedure

This lesson is designed to prepare students for the debates that will take place during the mock First Federal Congress simulation by teaching, and allowing students to practice, some simplified rules of parliamentary procedure.

Targeted Audience: Students preparing to engage in debates.

Goals: This lesson is designed to help students **(a)** acquire and reinforce the skills necessary to participate in formal debates, including the mock congress that follows and **(b)** identify and employ the formal methods by which democratic groups such as Congress function.

Time to Complete: 1 class period.

Standards Addressed

- **Delaware:**
 - **Civics Standard 4 (Grades 4-5):** Identify and employ the formal and informal methods by which democratic groups function.

Materials Needed

- Copies of Handout 1 (see [Unit Resources](#)) – Rules of Debate: Simplified Parliamentary Procedure
- A gavel (optional).

Terms to Know: parliamentary procedure, motion, second, caucus, table, resolution

Procedures

1. Setting the Stage: Tell students that they are going to begin a unit in which they will be asked to assume the roles of congressmen while engaging in a mock Congress simulation. Before the class begins the unit, the students must learn the rules for debate. This is an important part of their citizenship education because, when they attend public meetings as participatory citizens, they will find that most meetings are guided by formal “rules of procedure,” and that a failure to understand these rules frequently serves as a deterrent to those who want to participate.

2. Introducing the Lesson: Tell students that they will learn the rules of debate by participating in a friendly mini-debate. Be sure to mention that the proposals, although worthy of discussion, are not actually being considered. Prior to class, create a list of

three resolutions that might be both relevant and somewhat controversial to the students. For example:

- **Resolution 1:** Our school will adopt a new school dress code (or uniform if the school already has a dress code).
- **Resolution 2:** School will begin and end _ hour later than it does currently.
- **Resolution 3:** The school year will be extended by five days.

Display the resolutions on the board or on an overhead projector.

3. Distribute copies of Handout 1 (“Parliamentary Procedures”): Guide students through the headers at the top of each chart. Introduce the language of debate referring to terms such as “motion,” “second,” and “caucus.” Explain the terms and the fact that much of the work of democratic groups occurs in small meetings known as caucuses. Tell them that they will be able to “motion” for a caucus during the debates that will be held today and over the course of the next week or so. Walk the students through the first and second columns of the chart and ask them to read over the remaining columns.

4. Guided Practice: Draw the students’ attention to the 3 resolutions that you prepared prior to class. Tell them you are going to help them learn to employ parliamentary procedures by engaging in an abbreviated debate. Mention that unless someone makes a motion to change the agenda, you will begin discussion on the first resolution and proceed through the remaining resolutions. Tell them that there may not be enough time to discuss them all so they should be sure to arrange the agenda according to their preferences. Field any questions, “open the floor,” and begin the debate.

5. Debate

6. Vote

7. Conclude: At the conclusion of the debates tell the students that they are now going to begin the unit on the First Federal Congress. Tell them that they will be using their new skills as they proceed through the lessons. Highlight the purposes of the unit, which are:

- to help students understand the role that Congress plays in our federal government.
- to help students acquire the confidence and skills which are necessary to participate effectively in our democratic system.
- to introduce and reinforce select Delaware and national social studies standards.
- to help students understand the importance of sectional and power sharing conflicts as well as compromises in American history.

8. Debrief: Reflect. Ask students the following questions:

- to what extent the rules of debate improve the quality of debates.
- to what extent they think a knowledge of parliamentary procedures is important to citizens in a democratic society.

Extension Activities

Have the students use some of the parliamentary procedures as part of the daily classroom routines (e.g. raising points of personal privilege, making motions to recess before leaving class). You will probably find that the students find their new knowledge to be both enjoyable and empowering.

Teaching Tips

You may want to consider videotaping a meeting of Congress on C-Span or a meeting of a local council or school board and show it to the students just prior to this lesson so that they experience the frustrations of hearing but not understanding parliamentary procedures. Ask them if they would know what to do if they wanted to speak at such a meeting. Discuss the effect that this ignorance may have on a citizen's desire to participate in civic meetings.