

Democracy for Ambassadors

As a Girl Scout Ambassador, you're so close to being old enough to vote—if you're not there already! The right to vote is one of the most important rights given to American citizens, and it's now extra important for you to be informed about your government and the officials you'll help elect. Find out everything you can in this badge—then get out there and vote!

Steps

1. Find out about local government
2. Find out about state government
3. Find out about the federal legislative branch
4. Find out about the federal executive branch
5. Find out about the federal judicial branch

Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I will have learned more about my local, state, and national government—and I'll be ready to use that knowledge to inform my voting.

**STEP****1**

Find out about local government

Have you ever looked at voting data from local elections? In most cases, turnout is very low—but some very important decisions are made at the local level of government. Get to know yours in this step.

CHOICES—DO ONE:

- Visit your town hall, city hall, or mayor's office.** Take a trip to talk to someone in one of these places about your local government and local elections. Ask any questions you can think of. Do they have suggestions for ways you might help increase voter turnout in local elections?

OR

- Talk to an expert.** Find an expert who can talk to you about your local government and local elections. This could be someone elected to local office, a teacher, a lawyer, or a judge. Ask any questions you can think of. Do they have suggestions for ways you might help increase voter turnout in local elections?

OR

- Go to a city or town hall meeting.** See democracy in action! Make a plan to go to a meeting when a vote will be held. Before you go, talk about what will be voted on and decide how you would vote if you could. If possible, attend a meeting when the public is given time to speak and share your thoughts. See how the vote turns out, then talk about your experience with family or friends.

Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more.

★ Three Branches of Government ★

The United States government—and the government for all of the states—is broken into three parts, or branches. The Constitution of the United States divided the government in this way to make sure that no one person or group has too much power.

Legislative—makes laws

Executive—enforces laws

Judicial—evaluates laws

A system of “checks and balances” helps to keep power evenly distributed between the three branches. Each branch “checks” the power of the other. For example, the legislative branch makes laws, but the president (or executive branch) can veto laws, and the judicial branch can declare a law unconstitutional.

STEP

2 Find out about state government

State governments and the United States government are all made up of three parts, or branches. The names of the three branches are legislative, executive, and judicial. Before doing the rest of the steps in this badge, read “Three Branches of Government” at the bottom of this page.

CHOICES—DO ONE:

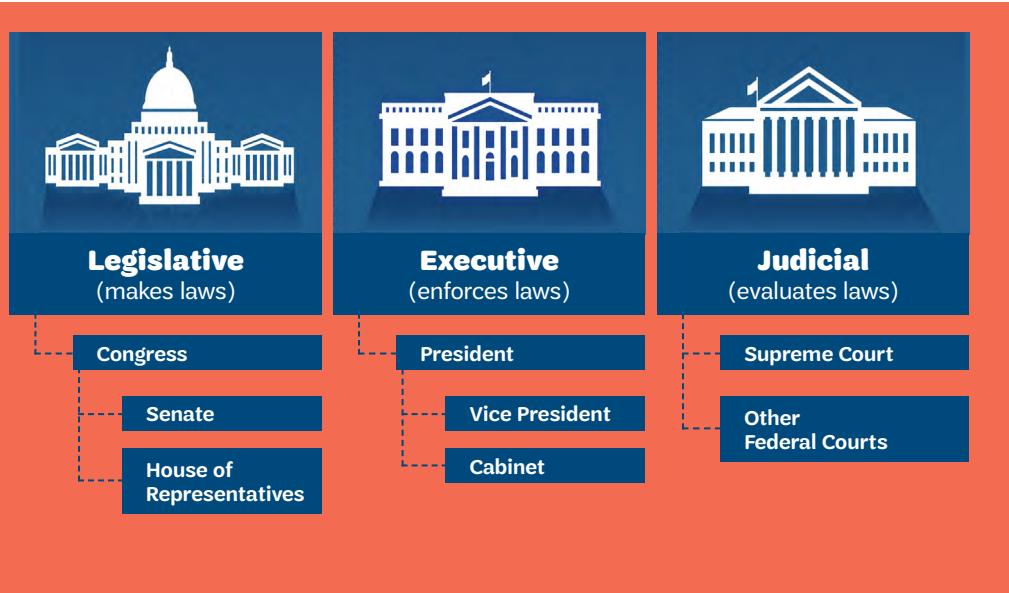
- Visit your state capitol building.** Take a trip with your friends or family and talk to someone there about how your state government works. How do the three branches of government work together? Ask any other questions you can think of.

OR

- Explore two sides.** Find out everything you can about an upcoming election or the most recent election in your state. Choose an issue that was (or is) divisive among the people of your state. It could be a ballot measure or simply a topic of discussion among citizens. Debate the issue in pairs, then switch sides and take the opposing view. Did this help you see both sides of the topic? Did it change your feelings at all?

OR

- Compare your governments.** Research your state government and find out everything you can about how it's run. Then, compare it to the national government. How are they alike? Can you find any differences? Talk about your findings with family or friends.



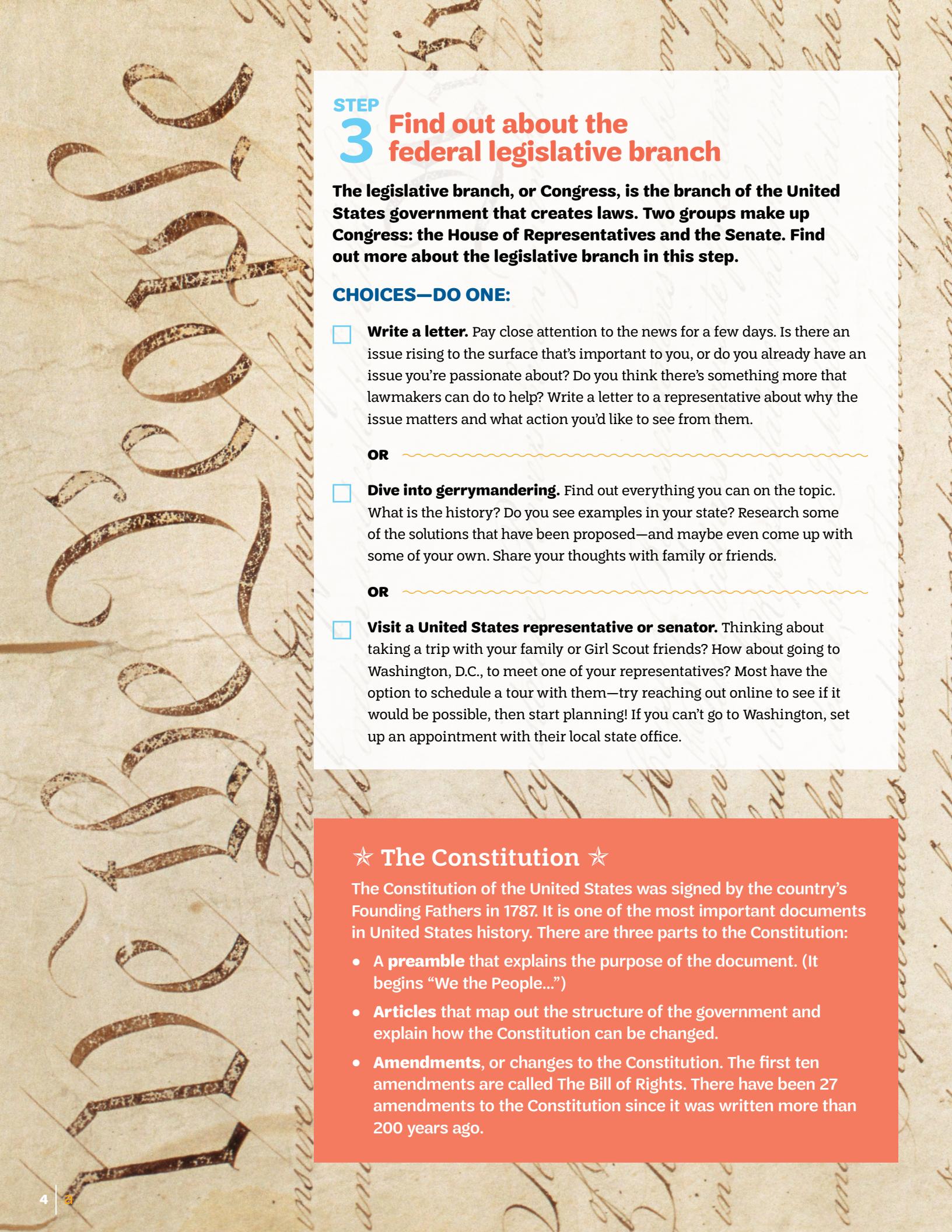
Cassandra Levesque

Girl Scout Cassandra Levesque was just 17 years old when she led a campaign to end child marriage in New Hampshire for her Gold Award. She helped write three bills that made it all the way to the New Hampshire Senate—and unanimously passed.

“If you’re wondering how a teenage girl like me ended up on the senate floor,” Cassie said, “I have two words for you: Girl Scouts. Girl Scouts are the leaders of today. We are future presidents. We are lawmakers—the majority of female senators and members of the House of Representatives are Girl Scout alums. We are unstoppable and we won’t be ignored.”

In 2018, Cassie ran for public office in New Hampshire and was elected to the State House of Representatives. At just 19 years old, she was the youngest female representative elected that year.

Unstoppable for sure!

A faint, repeating watermark of the Declaration of Independence's text serves as the background for the page.

STEP

3 Find out about the federal legislative branch

The legislative branch, or Congress, is the branch of the United States government that creates laws. Two groups make up Congress: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Find out more about the legislative branch in this step.

CHOICES—DO ONE:

- Write a letter.** Pay close attention to the news for a few days. Is there an issue rising to the surface that's important to you, or do you already have an issue you're passionate about? Do you think there's something more that lawmakers can do to help? Write a letter to a representative about why the issue matters and what action you'd like to see from them.

OR

- Dive into gerrymandering.** Find out everything you can on the topic. What is the history? Do you see examples in your state? Research some of the solutions that have been proposed—and maybe even come up with some of your own. Share your thoughts with family or friends.

OR

- Visit a United States representative or senator.** Thinking about taking a trip with your family or Girl Scout friends? How about going to Washington, D.C., to meet one of your representatives? Most have the option to schedule a tour with them—try reaching out online to see if it would be possible, then start planning! If you can't go to Washington, set up an appointment with their local state office.

★ The Constitution ★

The Constitution of the United States was signed by the country's Founding Fathers in 1787. It is one of the most important documents in United States history. There are three parts to the Constitution:

- A **preamble** that explains the purpose of the document. (It begins "We the People...")
- **Articles** that map out the structure of the government and explain how the Constitution can be changed.
- **Amendments**, or changes to the Constitution. The first ten amendments are called The Bill of Rights. There have been 27 amendments to the Constitution since it was written more than 200 years ago.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

The House of Representatives' most important job is creating laws. A bill becomes a law through these steps. Do you see any examples of checks and balances in this process?

1. Someone has an idea. This idea can start with anyone, even girls like you! If an elected official likes the idea and wants to make a law, they write a bill.

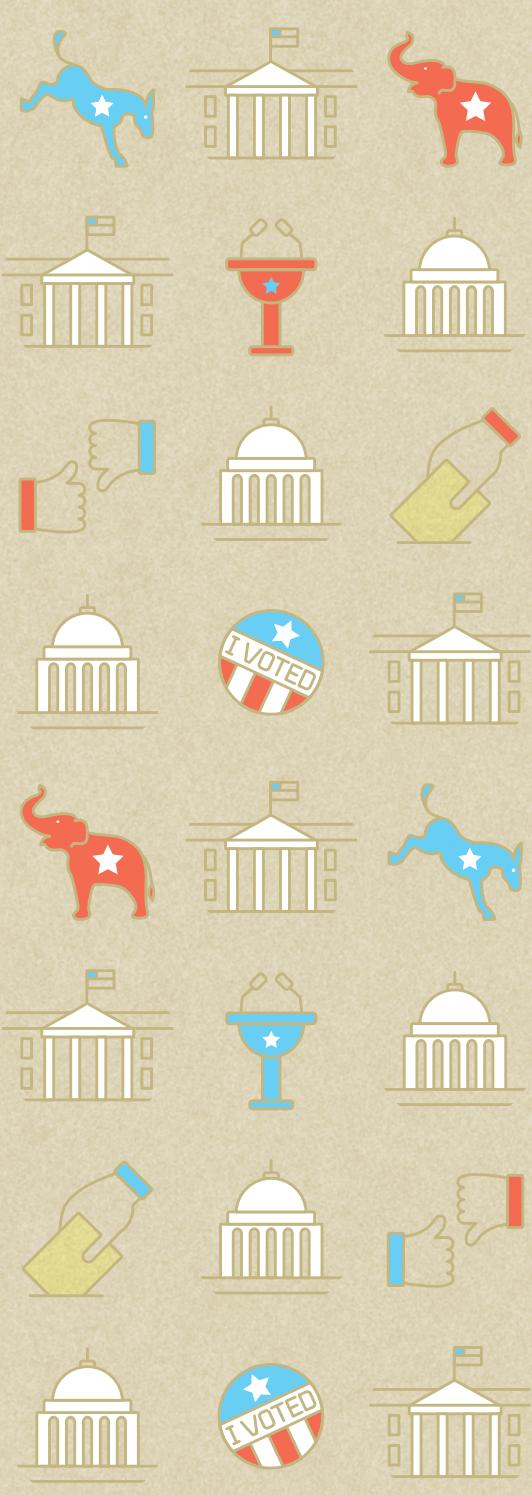
2. The bill is introduced. Bills are officially introduced in the House of Representatives when they are placed in a special box called “the hopper.”

3. The bill goes to committee. A group of committee members (senators and representatives) meets to work on the bill and revise it, if necessary. Then, they take a vote to reject or accept the bill. Depending on the outcome, the bill goes to a subcommittee for additional work or to the House or Senate floor for debate.

4. Congress debates and votes. During the debate, members of the House or Senate can suggest changes to the bill. Then, they take a vote. If it passes, the bill is sent to the other house of Congress to go through this process again. If both houses receive a majority vote on the same version of the bill, it goes to the president.

5. The president takes action. Now it's the president's turn. They can:

- Approve and pass.** The bill is law!
- Veto.** The president rejects the bill and sends it back to Congress. Congress can then take a vote. If the bill receives a two-thirds majority vote from the House and Senate, they can override the veto. The bill becomes law.
- Choose no action.** The president does nothing. After ten days with no action, if Congress is in session, the bill becomes law.
- Pocket veto.** If Congress adjourns—or goes out of session—within ten days after the president receives the bill, the president can choose not to sign it. The bill does not become law.



STEP 4 Find out about the federal executive branch

The head of the executive branch of the United States government is the president. The vice president and cabinet members are also part of this branch. (The president chooses members of their cabinet, or advisors; they are approved by the Senate.) Find out more about the executive branch in this step.

CHOICES—DO ONE:

- Encourage voting.** Look into voter turnout rates in your state—and the rest of the country—for the last presidential election. Did most adult citizens cast a vote? If the number was far from 100 percent, why do you think that might be? Research potential options for increasing voter turnout and take part in at least one option.

OR 
- Explore parties.** Candidates for president in the United States may be Democrats, Republicans, or members of a third party. (In the United States, a third party is anything other than the Republican or Democratic parties.) Try to take a step back from everything you've heard about these parties. Research the ideologies, including one or two third parties. Which aligns most closely with your values? Test the waters by learning more about that party in your area—maybe even attend a meeting for young members. Remember, you can always change your mind in the future!

OR 
- Look into lobbying.** Research the role of lobbyists in the most recent presidential election. What kind of influence do you think they had, and how do you feel about it? Share your thoughts with family or friends.
For More FUN: Interview a lobbyist; find out what they do and why.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ The Electoral College ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Electoral College was a compromise decided on by the Founding Fathers of the United States, who could not decide how the president should be elected. Some members thought Congress should choose the president; some thought the president should be chosen by a straight popular

vote of the country's citizens. There was also debate about whether each state's vote should count equally.

In this compromise, electors for the whole country make up the Electoral College. (This is a group of people, not an actual place.)

The electors cast their state's official vote based on the winner of the state's popular vote. There are 538 electors in the country; the number of electors for each state is based on the population of that state. A presidential candidate must win a majority of these votes to win an election.

STEP

5 Find out about the federal judicial branch

The judicial branch of the government is made up of courts and judges. The system ladders up to the highest court in the country, the Supreme Court. Take a closer look at the judicial branch in this step.

CHOICES—DO ONE:

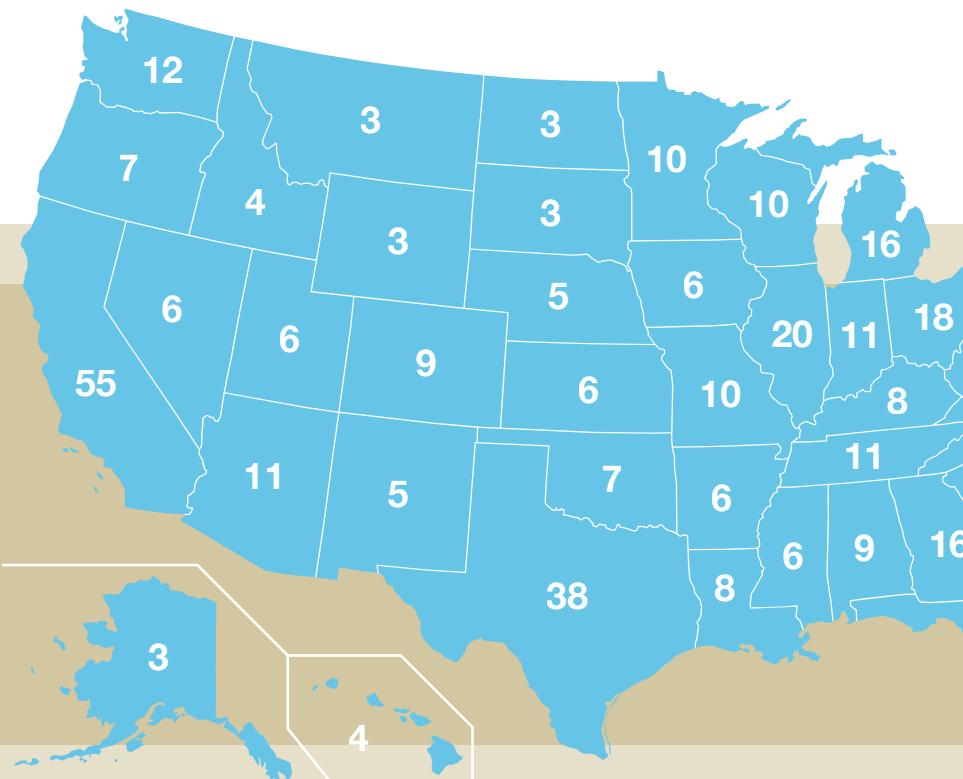
- Judge a case.** Choose one Supreme Court case from history and find out everything you can about it. What was the process to get to the Supreme Court? What was the decision? How close was the vote? Do you agree with the result? Share your thoughts with family or friends.

OR

- Hold a mock trial.** Mock trials can be a great way to learn the ins and outs of the court system. Gather a group of friends or family members and decide on a case to try. You can find lots of examples online, from real-world cases to fictional ones. Watch informative videos of the mock trial process, then dive in!

OR

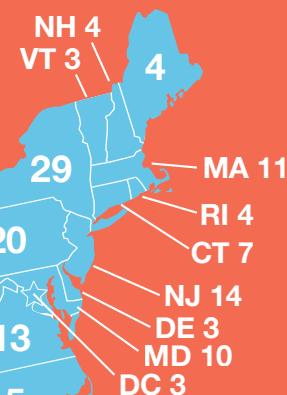
- Go to court.** One of the best ways to understand the legal system is to see it for yourself! Make a plan to attend a session in court. You can start by contacting your local United States District Court clerk's office to find out what cases are on the calendar, what time they'd recommend for a student visit, and anything you should know before attending.



★ The Supreme Court ★

The Supreme Court, which is sometimes called “The Highest Court in the Land,” is made up of nine people called justices. These justices were all men until 1981, when the first woman, Sandra Day O’Connor, joined the court. (She was a Girl Scout too!) Today the court is a mixture of men and women.

Justices are appointed, not elected, and they serve lifelong terms. That means they generally stay on the court until they pass away or retire, but the Constitution gives Congress the power to impeach—or try to remove—justices for “Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors.” There go those checks and balances again!



Electoral college map for the 2012, 2016, and 2020 United States presidential elections, using apportionment data released by the United States Census Bureau.

Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Talking to my siblings about why it's important to vote in local elections
- Inviting younger Girl Scouts to take part in a mock trial
- Talking to an older family member about the different political parties in the United States and whether their thoughts about them have changed over the course of their lifetime

I'm inspired to:

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