

# Tennessee Secretary of State

## *Blue Book Lesson Plans*

### Interest Groups vs. State and Local Government

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**Grade Level:** High School, U.S. Government and Civics

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For additional lesson plans, click [here](#).



*There are a limited number of hard copies of the Blue Book available. To order a set for your classroom, please contact the Secretary of State's office at (615) 741-2819 or one of your local legislators. The online version of the Blue Book is also available [here](#).*

### Introduction:

This lesson is designed to assist teachers in instructing students on the ways U.S. citizens can become politically active and explain one way is to join an interest group. Additionally, the lesson covers the role and function of interest groups and how they can impact laws and policies offered by local and state government officials. Teachers can choose an interest group appropriate for their class and discuss the impact that group has in state politics. This lesson is geared toward 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students for the U.S. Government and Civics class, however, the assignments can be tweaked for differentiated instruction.

### Guiding Questions:

- What roles can citizens engage in to become more active in politics?
- What are the roles and functions of interest groups?
- How do interest groups influence state and local governments?

**Learning Objectives:** In the course of the lesson, students will...

- Explain and explore ways citizens can become politically engaged.
- Define and identify the roles and functions of interest groups.
- Analyze how interest groups influence state and local laws and policies.

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## Curriculum Standards:

**GC.38** Connect insights gained from appropriate informational text to describe the obligations of civic-mindedness, including voting, being informed on civic issues, volunteering and performing public service, and serving in the military or alternative service.

**GC.60** Describe how citizens can monitor and influence local and state government as individuals and members of interest groups.

## Preparation Instructions:

- 1) Choose an interest group that your students would relate to or directly affects issues in your community. Some examples might include: American Civil Liberties Union, Americans for Prosperity, Beach Center, National Rifle Association, Sierra Club, StudentsFirst Tennessee, Tennessee Education Association, etc.
- 2) Search the interest group's website for their mission statement and other information about the group, many of the national groups may have local Tennessee chapters.
- 3) Find 3-4 articles about the interest group and how they worked to pass legislation (or stop legislation from passing) in a recent legislative session. Some examples of different articles to find:
  - Press releases from interest group about the issue/legislation
  - Newspaper articles about the issue/legislation
  - Press releases from the opposing side
  - Copies of the legislation
- 4) Optional: Find a commercial, radio ad, news story, or even video footage from a legislative session that addresses the issue and selected legislation.

## Materials Needed:

- 1) White board
- 2) Computer and projector
- 3) *Tennessee Blue Book* or PDF of selected pages (print out or show on the board)
  - [pg. vii, Preface](#)
  - [pgs. viii - ix, graphic organizer of state government](#)

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- 4) Internet access for discussion (either for teacher or for the students)
  - Links/information on local government such as the mayor's office, city council, or boards and commissions. You can also add additional links as you see fit.
  - Access to interest group's website
- 5) Copies of news articles chosen

## Lesson Activities:

### Part I: Introduction to Citizenship and Interest Groups

- 1) Place the word "citizen" in the center of the whiteboard. This will be used as an introduction to the discussion. This can be a "think-pair-share" activity or a whole class discussion. Ask students to explain what they think are the roles and duties of a U.S. citizen and share with the whole class. Ask one student to come up to the board and write out the answers from the student discussion.
  - Lead a group discussion on the duties of being a U.S. citizen.
  - What does it mean to be a citizen of the United States?
  - What do you think are some important roles a citizen must play in a society?
  - What does it mean to be an American? How would you describe America to a person from another country?
  - Do you feel most Americans are engaged in politics? Why or why not?
- 2) Ask students: What are the ways citizens can get involved in politics?
- 3) Explain that you want to explore "interest groups" further.
- 4) Ask students: Why do you think interest groups are important to our society?
- 5) Lead a group discussion on the roles and functions of interest groups:
  - Why are interest groups important to a democracy?
  - If we did not have interest groups, what other ways could citizens voice their opinion on issues in the community or in the country?
  - Would you join an interest group? Why or why not?
  - List interest groups you are familiar with from family, friends or TV ads. What are the interests of these groups?



## Part II-Structure of State and Local Government

- 1) Take this time to educate the students on government structure so they can understand the hierarchy of the government and where to go for further information.
  - State Government- *Tennessee Blue Book*, have students look at the copies of the *Tennessee Blue Book*, selected PDF pages on the board, or print off copies.
    - [pg. vii, Preface](#)
    - [pgs. viii - ix, graphic organizer of state government](#)
  - Local government - Links/information on local government such as the mayor's office, city council, or boards and commissions. Either show the students on the board or print off copies for them.
- 2) Have the students compare and contrast the structure of both systems.
- 3) \*\* As an extended assignment (or if you have full technology in your classroom) you can have your students create a scavenger hunt. Have students create 5-7 questions from both state and local government websites. Pick the top ten questions and have the students complete the scavenger hunt as a class or as a homework assignment. The students whose questions were chosen could receive extra credit points.

## Part III- Interests Groups vs. State and Local Government

This section will show the influence of interest groups on laws passed at the state level.



laws? How can they influence the lawmaking process? What laws would they want to change and why?

- 1) Tell the students the interest group you have chosen to discuss in class. Ask students how they feel about the issue the interest group represents. What do they think about current laws about the issue? Should the laws be different? Why or why not? What are the philosophical views behind the opposing sides?

- 2) Go to the interest group's website and show students their mission statement and purpose. Have students discuss: Does this group have influence in changing

- 3) Pass out the selected articles. Review with students the process of submitting bills, how interest groups push for legislation, and how a bill becomes a law. You can either read the articles out loud with the class or break into groups and have them “think-pair-share” their answers. Another option is to split the class into groups, distribute each article to each group, and have them do a quick presentation on their article to share with class.
- 4) After the article analysis, have students answer the following questions: If this legislation passes (or if it already has), how will this law impact state and local government? What government departments (on the state and local levels) will be impacted from this state law?
- 5) You can also give them closing questions to check their understanding on the lesson as an immediate assessment. Possible closing questions:
  - What are interest groups?
  - How do interest groups reflect a democratic society?
  - What does it mean to be a citizen?
  - Give some steps on passing a bill.
  - How can an interest group influence the lawmaking process? What steps of lawmaking can interest groups influence?
  - List some similarities and differences between the state and local government structures?
  - Which has more power: state or local governments? Why?
  - How can interest groups influence these different levels of government?

### **Extended Assignment or Assessment:**

Students will be asked to research interest groups, choose one of the groups that interests them, and present their findings to the class. You can also have them submit a copy as a paper assignment.

Students will create a PowerPoint presentation including the following information:

- Interest group name
- Purpose and mission
- What does the interest group want to change or enforce?
- What laws have they changed or are they working to change?
- Why did they choose this interest group?
- If you could create an interest group, what would be its name and purpose?

You can tweak the requirements as you see fit but the purpose is for students to share their level of understanding of interest groups and how they work. All activities can be modified to your classroom specifications.

Option for extension: Invite state legislators or local elected officials to come speak to the classroom about their role in government.