

## 2.6 WHAT IS A BILL?

**Essential Question(s):** What is the difference between a bill and a law? What bills have had significant impact on people in the United States? Why do some bills pass into law and others do not?

### Overview

In 1976, *Schoolhouse Rock!* released “I’m Just a Bill,” an animated video with a catchy tune that educated students around the U.S. about the legislative process. Since then, music has changed and animation has changed, but the actual process of becoming a bill and then a law is not much different.

Students’ understanding of the fundamentals of laws in the U.S. begins with understanding the difference between rules and laws and their pivotal relationship to bills.

### Snapshot

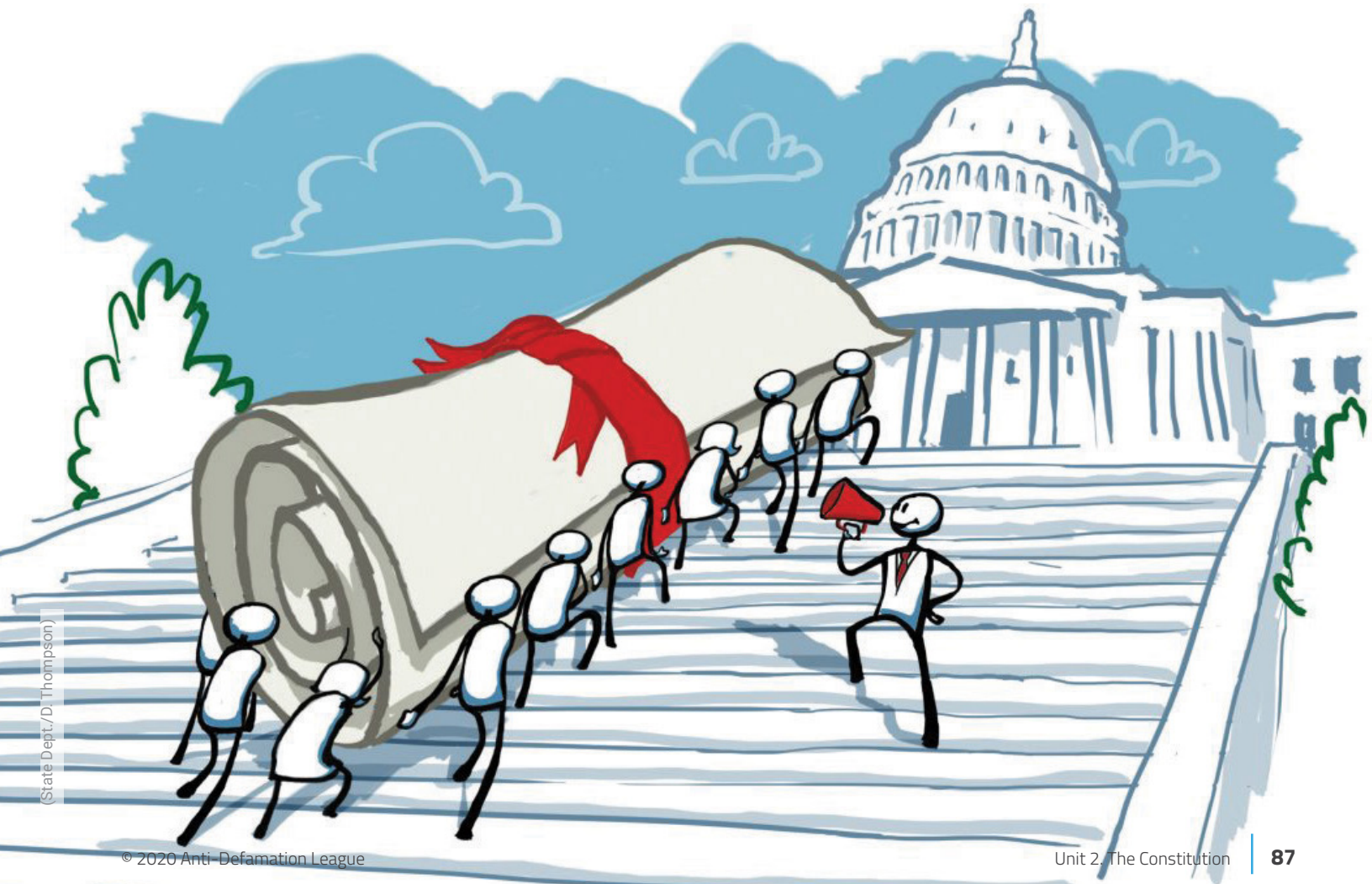
**What Students Will Learn:**

In this lesson, students will determine the differences between rules and laws and will begin brainstorming and drafting a bill.

**Standard(s):**

D2.Civ.12.9-12

**Time:** 50 minutes





## Key Vocabulary

act  
bill  
law  
legislation  
legislator  
legislature  
rule

## Objectives

- Explain the difference between rules and laws.
- Explain the role of a bill.
- Read bills.
- Draft a bill.

## Differentiation

Students are able to work with partners or in small groups.

## What's Needed

- Writing utensil and paper or 1:1 device
- Internet access, computer, screen or projector, speakers
- Prepare the following to be projected for whole class viewing: (1) examples of "Law," (2) "Rules vs. Laws," (3) definition of "bill" in Step #8, (4) "[Jabara-Heyer No Hate Act Bill](#)" and (5) "[3D-Printed Gun Safety Act Bill](#)."
- "Schoolhouse Rock—I'm Just a Bill" YouTube clip (2011, 3 min., Schoolhouse Rock, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgVKvqTltto](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgVKvqTltto))
- Make copies of "Drafting a Bill," one for each student.

## Classroom Setup

Desks should be arranged in pairs or small groups for easy viewing of the projector screen.

## Direct Teaching

1. As a warm up, have students write a quick answer to the following prompt:

*What is a law you have to follow in your city or town? What does the law say is illegal? Why do you think it became a law?*

If students are struggling, ask them what is illegal if they are under the age of 16 (answer: driving).

2. Display and share with students some laws in Arizona, Louisiana and Illinois. For each law, be sure to provide the explanation given of *why* the law came about.

*Arizona—It is illegal to have a donkey sleep in a bathtub.*

*Louisiana—In Louisiana, you can be fined up to \$500 for sending pizza (goods or services) to someone's house without their knowing, if you're trying to harass them.*

Illinois—A child under 16 years old must have an employment certificate to work; they cannot work in hazardous jobs and they must work limited hours. An employer in violation can be penalized up to \$5,000.

3. Explain that these laws were passed through legislation. Ask students, “Do you think the consequences for these laws are the same or different, and why?”
4. Introduce the relationship of rules to laws. Define “rule” as follows:

**Rule:** A set of explicit or understood regulations or instructions created by individuals to govern conduct within a particular situation.

Reference a set of rules you have established for your classroom as an example.

5. Ask students, “What is a law?” Elicit responses then share the following definition:

A **law** is a set of rules that are created by governmental institutions to regulate the actions of the people who recognize the set. Breaking laws may mean different penalties based on the severity and impact of the action.

6. Display “[Rules vs. Laws](#)” and ask students, “How are rules and laws different?” After a few responses, note the following differences if they were not mentioned:

Rules	Laws
Created by individuals	Created by governmental institutions
Enforced by the individuals who created the rules	Enforced by a higher governmental office, usually the police and the prosecutor’s office
When broken, consequences are determined at the discretion of the individuals who created the rules	Consequences are predetermined and carry a heavier weight like jail time, a fine or a criminal conviction

7. Ask students, “How do rules become laws? Who is involved in the process?” Quickly elicit responses, then tell students they will now watch a brief video as an introduction to this process.
8. Show students the “[Schoolhouse Rock - I’m Just a Bill](#)” YouTube clip.
9. Summarize by sharing with students that rules can become laws when legislators pass a bill.
10. Ask students, “Based on what you just viewed, what is a bill?” Elicit responses, then display and share the following definition:

A **bill** is the beginning of a law. It details what should be considered by the legislature and outlines the consequences if someone breaks the proposed law. A bill must pass a series of legislative actions before becoming a law. Once it becomes a law, it is referred to as an “act of the legislature.”

11. Ask students, “Who participates in legislature? What if you have an idea for a bill?”
12. Explain to students that they are going to look at two actual bills. Display the “[Jabara-Heyer No Hate Act Bill](#)” and “[3D-Printed Gun Safety Act Bill](#)” slides one at a time. Each slide provides a link to the actual bill.

As you show each of the two bills, point out the titles, wording inside the bill and the bill’s main content. Students do not need to read the entire bill, only identify the main purpose and any consequences detailed in the bill. This is just an introduction to what a bill looks like and how it reads.

Return to the bill’s accompanying slide and use these bullet points to summarize the main points of the bill.

13. Facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:

- How might these two bills impact people in the United States?
- What kinds of bills do you think people are seeking or do you think are needed in the U.S.? What might be the impact of those bills when they become laws?

14. Distribute the “[Drafting a Bill](#)” handout for students to complete in class or as homework.


| **Note:** Consider having students keep their drafts to reference when conducting lesson “[2.7 Becoming a Law](#).”

# LAW

In Arizona, it is illegal to have a donkey sleep in a bathtub.

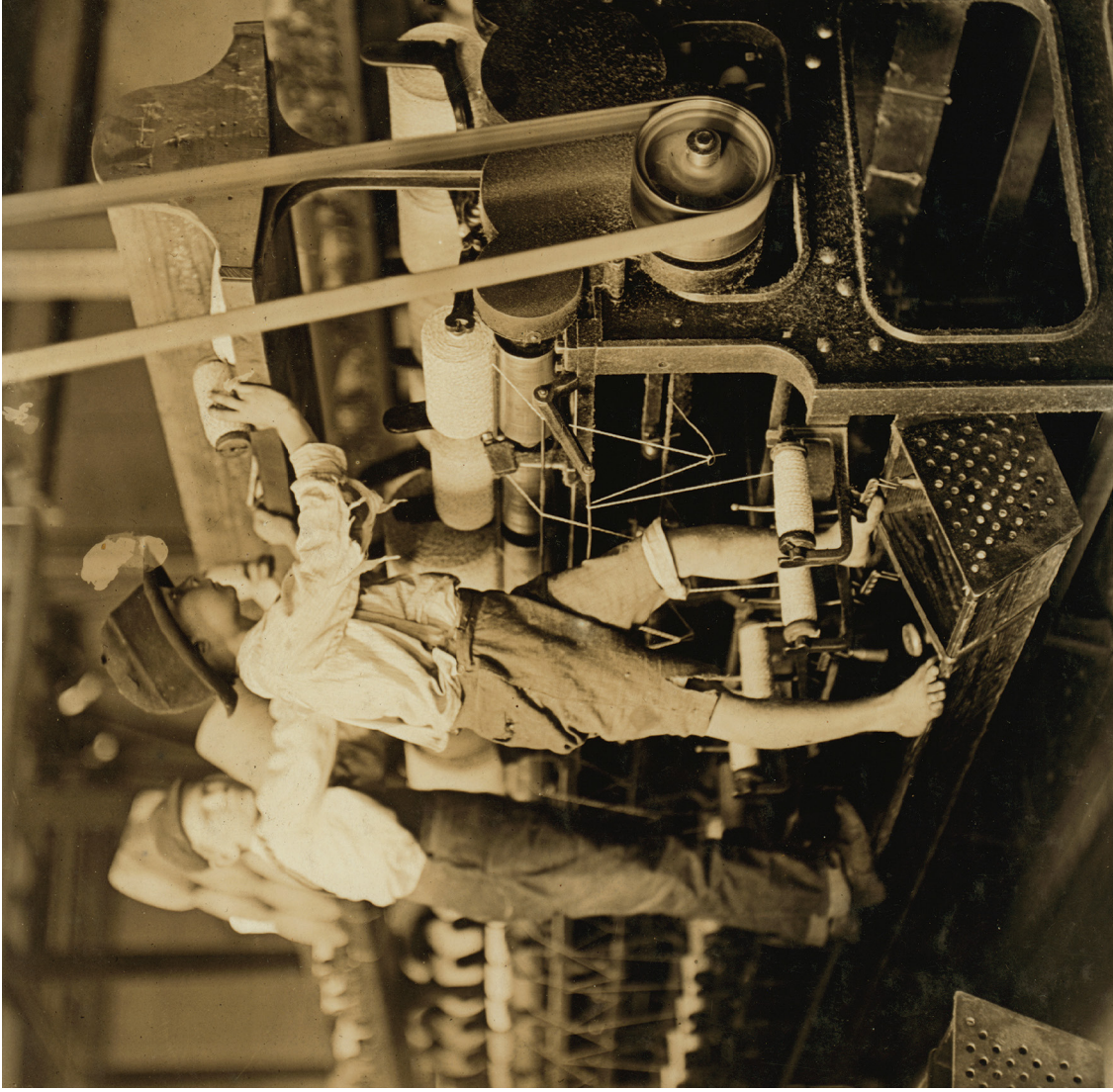


This law was prompted by a public menace case in 1924 when a donkey who was used to sleeping in the owner's old bathtub was carried away in a flood and the town went to great expense and effort to rescue the donkey.



In Louisiana, you can be fined up to \$500 for sending pizza (goods or services) to someone's house without their knowing, if you're trying to harass them.

This law was prompted because of a prank that became epic. In pre-Internet days, you did not pay for your pizza until it was delivered. The prank was to order and have a pizza delivered to a person who did not make the order nor was aware of the order but had to pay the bill because the pizza was delivered to them. This is considered harassment since you are trying to stick them with the cost for something they did not order.



In Illinois, a child under 16 years old must have an employment certificate to work; they cannot work in hazardous jobs and they must work limited hours. Violation of this law provides for a maximum penalty of up to \$5,000 for each violation.

The reason for this Illinois Child Labor Law is to protect the well-being of minors. Throughout history and particularly during the Industrial Revolution, children worked in miserable conditions, including crowded and unclean factories, for long hours in unsafe environments. They were paid less and generally placed in factories or mines because their small stature enabled them to repair machinery and navigate small areas that were challenging for adults. Also, working children were unable to attend school, creating a cycle of poverty. There are both federal and state child labor laws. When federal and state child labor laws conflict, an employer must apply the stricter law.

# RULES VS. LAWS

## Rules

A set of explicit or understood regulations or instructions created by individuals to govern conduct within a particular situation.

## Laws

A set of rules that are created by governmental institutions to regulate the actions of the people who recognize the set. Breaking laws may mean different penalties based on the severity and impact of the action.



# JABARA-HEYER NO HATE ACT BILL

[www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr2383/BILLS-117hr2383ih.pdf](https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr2383/BILLS-117hr2383ih.pdf)

- Also known as the Jabara-Heyer National Opposition to Hate, Assault, and Threats to Equality Act of 2021, this bill was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on April 8, 2021, and in the U.S. Senate on April 13, 2021.
- The bill creates a cause of action for: (1) a victim of a crime motivated by actual or perceived race, color, religion, or national origin; and (2) a victim of a crime motivated by actual or perceived religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability, occurring in the special maritime or territorial jurisdiction of the United States or affecting interstate commerce. This bill provides federal grants for states and local governments implementing the latest crime reporting system.
- A court imposing a penalty for a violation of the federal hate crime statute may order the defendant to participate in education classes or community service related to the community harmed by the defendant's offense as part of their supervised release.
- The bill directs the Department of Justice to issue grants to states to create hate crime reporting hotlines.
- This bill was signed into law by President Biden as part of the COVID-19 Hate Crime Act in May 2021.

# 3D-PRINTED GUN SAFETY ACT BILL

[www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr4225/BILLS-117hr4225ih.pdf](http://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr4225/BILLS-117hr4225ih.pdf)

- Also known as the 3D-Printed Gun Act of 2021, this bill was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on June 29, 2021.
- Recognizes that technological developments allow 3D printing of firearms and firearm parts by unlicensed individuals.
- Recognizes that the availability of online schematics for 3D printing of firearms increases the risk that people prohibited from possessing firearms under federal law will obtain a firearm through 3D printing that cannot be traced because these firearms do not have serial numbers.
- Prohibits intentionally publishing digital instructions for programming a 3D printer to make a firearm.

# DRAFTING A BILL

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

**Brainstorm:** What do you want to see change in your school, community, country or world?

Pick one thing from your brainstorm above. What do you want to see change? Write it below.

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What bill would help make that change happen? Write a detailed description of what your bill would say. Include a penalty if the bill is broken.

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What would the title of your bill be?

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Any other details about your bill?

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