A LOOK at the Virginia General Assembly

An Information and Activities Book for grades 4-5
A LOOK AT THE CAPITOL TIMELINE

1619
The first English-speaking representative assembly in America met at Jamestown in 1619.

1699
The General Assembly of 1699 decided to move the capital of Virginia from Jamestown to Williamsburg. Williamsburg was situated at a higher elevation than Jamestown. The capital of Virginia remained in Williamsburg until 1780.

1780
The General Assembly of 1780 decided to move the capital of Virginia to Richmond. The population was moving west and Richmond’s central location favored trade. The Capitol was designed by Thomas Jefferson and first used in 1788. The design was based on the Maison Carrée in France where Jefferson served as U.S. Ambassador.

1906 & 2007
Wings were added to the Capitol in 1906 for the Senate and House. In 2007, a new underground addition opened under the South Lawn which includes a gift shop, exhibit space, meeting rooms and a café.
Richmond is the capital of Virginia. The General Assembly meets here every year beginning on the second Wednesday in January for 60 calendar days in even years and 30 calendar days in odd years (with the option to extend for 30 additional days). There are 40 Senate districts and 100 House districts. Senators and Delegates come from all across the Commonwealth.

The General Assembly is known as a citizen legislature. Senators and Delegates come from all regions of Virginia and most have full-time careers in addition to their duties as a legislator. They are teachers, professors, doctors, lawyers, business owners, and accountants. Members of the General Assembly represent citizens and discuss a variety of issues ranging from agriculture and education to transportation and tourism. In addition, they enact laws of the Commonwealth, approve the budget, levy taxes, elect judges and confirm appointments by the Governor.
A LOOK AT THE
THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT

LEGISLATIVE

The 1776 Virginia Constitution confirmed our bicameral legislature, which consists of the Senate and House of Delegates. The present state Constitution, adopted in 1970, provides that the Senate shall consist of 33 to 40 members and the House of Delegates shall consist of 90 to 100 members. All members of the General Assembly are elected by qualified voters within their respective Senate and House districts. The terms of office are four years for members of the Senate and two years for members of the House. Members may not hold any other public office during their term of office. The General Assembly's chief responsibilities are to represent citizens in the formulation of public policy, enact laws of the Commonwealth, approve the budget, levy taxes, elect judges and confirm appointments by the Governor.

EXECUTIVE

The executive branch of government has sole authority and responsibility for the daily administration of the state bureaucracy. The executive branch does not make laws (the role of the legislature), or interpret them (the role of the judiciary). While the legislative and executive branches often work together on shaping proposed legislation, the role of the executive branch is to enforce the law as written by the legislature and interpreted by the judicial system. As chief executive, the governor has extensive financial control, broad powers of appointment, and authority over the entire organization and administration of the executive branch. With ready access to the public, the governor has extensive opportunities to focus attention on operations or proposals and to influence public opinion.

JUDICIAL

The aim of the judicial branch is to assure that disputes are resolved justly, promptly, and economically through a court system unified in its structure and administration. This system is comprised of the Supreme Court of Virginia, the Court of Appeals of Virginia, circuit courts in thirty-one judicial circuits, general district and juvenile and domestic relations district courts in thirty-two districts, and magistrates in offices in thirty-two districts. The administrative office of the courts, known in Virginia as the Office of the Executive Secretary, supports the administration of the court system under the direction of the Chief Justice and the Executive Secretary.
GOVERNOR

- The Governor serves a four-year term and cannot serve consecutive terms.
- All legislation passed by the Senate and House is reviewed by the Governor.
- The Governor has an office on the third floor of the Capitol.

SENATE

- 40 Senators
- Each member serves a four-year term.
- The Presiding Officer is the Lieutenant Governor.
- The Clerk serves as the Chief Administrative Officer.
- The Senate meets in the West Wing of the Capitol.
HOUSE
- 100 Delegates
- Each member serves a two-year term.
- The Presiding Officer is the Speaker.
- The Clerk serves as the Chief Administrative Officer.
- The House meets in the East Wing of the Capitol.
A LOOK AT HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW

DRAFTING AND INTRODUCTION

The Senators and Delegates meet with their constituents to develop proposals to be introduced as bills. They work with the legislative staff to draft a bill that would create a new law, or change or repeal the current law. The Senators and Delegates then introduce their bills in their respective houses.

COMMITTEE ACTION

After a bill is introduced, it is referred to the appropriate standing committee. In the Senate, bills are referred by the Clerk of the Senate. In the House, bills are referred by the Speaker. The standing committees have scheduled meetings or public hearings every week to address the bills referred to them. In these meetings, legislators and the public may present their opinions on the bill.

COMMITTEE MEETING

After listening to testimony, the committee will vote to recommend the passage or defeat of the bill. They may also offer changes (called amendments) at this time. If the committee recommends passage of the bill, it then goes before the entire Senate or House for consideration.
In accordance with our State Constitution, the title of the bill must be read three different times. The bill may be amended once it has been read a second time. The pros and cons of the bill may be debated on the third reading.

**IN THE OTHER BODY**

If the bill passes, it is then sent to the other body where it will go through a similar process of committee action, floor debate, and voting.

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

If the bill passes both houses without any amendments, it then goes to the Governor. If the bill is amended, it is then returned to the original body for approval. If each house insists on its own form of the bill, a committee of conference is usually created. A compromise report from the committee is sent to each house for approval, then sent to the Governor.

The Governor may take one of the following actions:

- Sign the bill into law.
- Take no action and after a specified time, the bill may become law without his signature.
- Amend the bill and return it to the General Assembly.
- Veto the bill and return it to the General Assembly. If the bill is vetoed, the Senate and House of Delegates may override the Governor’s veto with approval of two-thirds of the members of both houses.
A LOOK AT THE STEPS OF A BILL

Here are seven steps that a bill must go through. They are not in the correct order. Using the information on how a bill becomes a law on the previous pages, place the steps in the correct numerical order.

___ Governor signs bill
___ Committee holds a public hearing
___ Third Reading - bill may be debated and passage vote taken
___ Bill introduced in the Senate by Senator
___ Committee Action
___ Second Reading - bill may be amended
___ Sent to the House for approval

Using the information about how a bill becomes a law, answer the following:

1. After the bill has been sent to the Governor, name three things he can do to the bill.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. If each house insists on its own form of a bill, what is usually created? What is sent to each house for approval?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
A LOOK AT HOW YOU WRITE YOUR OWN BILL

Use the bill template below to write out an idea you have for a new law in Virginia.

SENATE BILL NO. 1

Patron - ____________________

Offered ______________ ____, 20__

Referred to the Committee ______________________________

A BILL relating to

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia that

OFFICIAL USE BY CLERKS

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<th>Passed By The House of Delegates</th>
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</table>

Date: Date:

Clerk of the Senate Clerk of the House of Delegates
A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A VIRGINIA STATE SENATOR

Being a member of the Senate of Virginia is a very demanding job. In addition to making laws, these legislators must also spend time meeting with constituents and reviewing mail. Here is a typical schedule for one member of the Senate of Virginia.

A Day in the Life of a Virginia Senator

- 7:30 a.m. - Subcommittee on health care, 4th floor conference room
- 8:30 a.m. - Senate Finance Committee Meeting, Senate Room B
- 9:45 a.m. - Meeting with Secretary of Public Safety, Capitol Square office
- 10:00 a.m. - Testify for Senate Bill 232, House Room D
- 10:30 a.m. - Subcommittee on Text Messaging, 3rd floor conference room
- 11:15 a.m. - Meet with high school students, Senate Room 3
- 11:30 a.m. - Meet with Girl Scout Troop #242, Capitol Steps
- Noon - Senate in Session, Senate Chamber, Capitol
- 2:00 p.m. - Senate Courts of Justice Committee Meeting, Senate Room A
- 2:30 p.m. - Testify for Senate Bill 500 in subcommittee
- 3:00 p.m. - Meeting with Mayor, Capitol Square office
- 3:30 p.m. - Meeting with members of the State Banking Association
- 4:00 p.m. - Subcommittee Meeting on public education
- 5:30 p.m. - Review mail and briefing on Thursday’s legislative schedule.
- 7:00 p.m. - Speaker for the Virginia State Chamber of Commerce Meeting

If time allows, attend:
- 5:30 p.m. - Attend local health fair downtown
- 8:30 p.m. - Museum reception
QUALIFICATIONS TO GET INVOLVED

PAGES
For each annual session of the General Assembly, pages are appointed by members of the Senate, the Lieutenant Governor and Clerk of the Senate. Pages are tasked with a variety of administrative support work while observing the process by which a bill becomes law. The application, admission criteria and program information is available on the Virginia General Assembly website each summer. Pages must be 13 or 14-years-old on the first day of session and residents of the Commonwealth of Virginia. They must also obtain permission from their school.

VOTING
A qualified voter in the Commonwealth of Virginia is a person 18 years of age or older, a citizen of the United States and a resident in the precinct in which he/she shall vote. Virginians must register to vote prior to an election with their local registrar.

SENATOR OR DELEGATE
In order to become a Senator or Delegate, a person must be at least 21 years of age, an eligible voter, and reside in the district for which he/she is seeking to represent.

GOVERNOR
To become Governor, a person must be a citizen of the United States, be at least 30 years of age, and be a registered voter and resident of the Commonwealth of Virginia for at least 5 years prior to election. Once elected, a Governor may not serve consecutive terms.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
The qualifications for becoming Lieutenant Governor are the same as for becoming Governor; however, once elected, there is no limit to the number of terms a Lieutenant Governor may serve.

ATTORNEY GENERAL
The Attorney General of Virginia must meet the same qualifications as the Governor of Virginia and also possess the qualifications required for a judge of a court of record. Like the Lieutenant Governor, there is no limit to the number of terms an Attorney General may serve.
A LOOK AT THE SENATE CHAMBER

1. The American and Virginia Flags are displayed behind the upper podium.

2. Each Senator has a desk in the Chamber. The desks have a microphone, computer power cord and voting buttons.

3. Each vote shows up on the voting boards.

4. Pages sit on the front benches. They run errands for Senators.

5. The Lieutenant Governor presides over the Senate from the upper podium.

6. The Gallery is where the public views session.

7. The Signers Tablet honors Virginians who signed the Declaration of Independence.
8 The Senate Seal was designed by the College of Arms in London and was adopted by the Senate on January 22, 1981.

9 Portraits of Lieutenant Governor’s of Virginia who have not gone on to become Governor hang in the Senate Chamber.

10 During the daily session of the Senate, the press is invited to sit in the Senate Chamber.

11 The Clerk of the Senate, who is charged with keeping the daily calendar, stands at this podium.
Each Delegate has a desk in the House Chamber. The desks have power cords and voting buttons.

Each vote shows up on the big voting boards.

The Speaker presides over the House of Delegates from the upper podium.

The Gallery is where the public views session.
5. A 20-pound, 24-karat gold coated mace is placed in front of the Clerk’s desk each day during session.

6. Pages sit on the front benches. They run errands for Delegates.

7. During the daily session of the House, the press is invited to sit in the rear of the House Chamber.

8. A plaque commemorating Nathaniel Bacon, who believed in governing by the consent of the people, is displayed behind the upper podium.
A LOOK AT THE FEATURES OF A SENATOR’S DESK

Each Senator has a desk in the Senate Chamber. The desks have been in continuous use since 1906. Each desk is now equipped with modern-day components.

- A power cord allows Senators to use their laptop computer while sitting at their desk in the Senate Chamber. Senators can access bills and e-mail during Session.
- Speaking into the microphone allows everyone to hear what a Senator has to say. The microphone is wired to the desk on a retractable cord.

1. This button turns the microphone on and off.
2. When a Senator wants to speak, the request to speak button is pressed. The presiding officer of the Senate calls on the Senator at the appropriate time.
3. Senators use the request page button when they need a page or messenger to run an errand.
4. There are three buttons used when voting on a bill:
   - Yea: A Senator votes in favor of a bill.
   - Nay: A Senator votes against a bill.
   - R36: A Senator is neither voting for or against the bill because of a conflict of interest.
A LOOK AT THE FEATURES OF A DELEGATE’S DESK

Each Delegate has a desk in the House Chamber. Buttons on a Delegate’s desk are similar to those on the desk of a Senator. They include the following:

A power cord allows Delegates to use their laptop computer. Delegates are able to access bills and e-mail during floor sessions.

The microphone is very similar to the one used by Senators during a floor session. It allows everyone to be heard and must be used when a Delegate speaks. The microphone is wired to the desk on a retractable cord.

1 **YEA**: A Delegate votes in favor of a bill.
2 **NAY**: A Delegate votes against a bill.
3 **R69**: A Delegate is neither voting for or against the bill because of a conflict of interest. R69 stands for Rule 69, one of 84 Rules of the House. This rule is similar to R36 in the Senate.
4 When a Delegate wants to speak, the **SPEAK** button is pressed.
5 Delegates use the **PAGE** button when then need assistance from a House Page.
A LOOK AT THE EMBLEMS OF VIRGINIA

The state bird is **THE CARDINAL**, a bird of the finch family.  
*(adopted in 1950)*

The state tree and floral emblem is **THE AMERICAN DOGWOOD**.  
It is a tree that blooms in early spring. The blossom is really a tiny cluster of flowers surrounded by four white leaves that look like petals.  
*(the flower was adopted in 1918 and tree was adopted in 1956)*

The state insect is **THE TIGER SWALLOWTAIL BUTTERFLY**.  
It is a yellow butterfly with black stripes on the forewings.  
*(adopted in 1991)*

The state saltwater fish is **THE STRIPED BASS**.  
It lives in the waters off Virginia’s coast.  
*(adopted in 2011)*

The state fish is **THE BROOK TROUT**.  
The trout is a freshwater game fish.  
*(adopted in 1993)*

The official boat is **THE CHESAPEAKE BAY DEADRISE**.  
The Deadrise is a wooden workboat used by fishermen and oystermen.  
*(adopted in 1988)*
The state dog is **THE AMERICAN FOXHOUND**. The Foxhound is a medium-sized hound trained to hunt foxes. *(adopted in 1966)*

The state snake is **EASTERN GARTER SNAKE**. This snake is either a greenish, brown or black color and has a distinct yellow or white stripe. *(adopted in 2016)*

The state bat is **THE BIG-EARED BAT**. It has brown fur and flies around at night. *(adopted in 2005)*

The state rock is **NELSONITE**. This tan and dark speckled, titanium-laced rock is named after Nelson County, Virginia where it was discovered. *(adopted in 2016)*

The state shell is **THE OYSTER SHELL** (*Crassostraea virginica*). The oyster lives on the bottom or adheres to rock in shallow water. *(adopted in 1974)*

The state fossil is **CHESAPECTEN JEFFERSONIUS**. The fossil celebrates the Chesapeake Bay and was named to honor Thomas Jefferson for his interest in natural history. *(adopted in 1993)*

The state drink is **MILK**, a nourishing beverage that is also the source of butter, cheese and yogurt. *(adopted in 1982)*
The official dance is **SQUARE DANCING**. It traces its ancestry to the English Country Dance and the French Ballroom Dance. *(adopted in 1991)*
The official state songs are
“SWEET VIRGINIA BREEZE” and “OUR GREAT VIRGINIA”
(adopted in 2015)
A LOOK AT VIRGINIA TRIVIA

FACTS

☑ Founded in 1607 in Jamestown
☑ Named for Queen Elizabeth I of England, the Virgin Queen
☑ Known as the Old Dominion. King Charles II gave it this name because Virginia remained loyal to the crown during the Civil War in England.
☑ The 10th state to ratify the U.S. Constitution (June 26, 1788)
☑ Richmond served as the capital of the Confederacy from 1861-1865 during the Civil War
☑ One of four states referred to as a commonwealth (Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania)
☑ The “Mother of States,” because seven other states were formed from the land that was once part of Virginia (Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and part of Minnesota)
☑ The “Mother of Presidents,” because eight U.S. Presidents were born in Virginia (George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, Zachary Taylor, and Woodrow Wilson)

NOTABLE PEOPLE

☑ George Washington - known as the “Father of our Country” for his contributions during the American Revolution
☑ Thomas Jefferson - wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom
☑ James Madison - known as the “Father of the Constitution”
☑ Patrick Henry - integral in the independence movement and famous for his “Give me Liberty, or give me Death!” speech
☑ George Mason - wrote the Virginia Declaration of Rights from which the U.S. Bill of Rights was derived
☑ Robert E. Lee - commanded the Confederate forces during the Civil War
☑ L. Douglas Wilder - the first elected African-American Governor in the United States
ACROSS
1. Thomas _______ designed the Capitol.
2. To make a change to a bill.
3. A Senator’s ____ is 4 years.
4. Known as “Father of our Country.”
5. Wrote the Virginia Declaration of Rights
6. Legislator’s ____ yea or nay to determine passage of a bill.
7. Once passed by the House and Senate and signed by the Governor, a bill becomes a ___.
8. The official drink of Virginia.
9. The Delegate or Senator who introduces a bill.
10. The official dance of Virginia.
11. The term for when the Governor rejects a bill passed by the General Assembly.
12. The name for a representative in the House.

DOWN
1. The location of the first settlement and capital of Virginia.
2. This symbol was adopted by the Senate on January 22, 1981.
3. The name for a representative in the Senate.
4. The current capital of Virginia is located here.
5. A young person who is appointed to serve during the General Assembly session.
6. The official bird of Virginia.
7. Virginia is not referred to as a state but rather as a _________.
8. The job of the Lieutenant Governor is to _______ over the daily sessions of the Senate.
9. Virginia has produced this many Presidents of the United States.
10. A former Senator, Lieutenant Governor, and also the first African American elected Governor in the United States.
11. The American Foxhound is the official _____ of Virginia.
12. To assemble and begin the daily session.
**MATCHING STATES AND CAPITALS**

Match the capital to the correct state by writing the number of the capital on the line beside the state.

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<th>Capital</th>
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<td>1. Albany</td>
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<td>Alaska</td>
<td>2. Annapolis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>3. Atlanta</td>
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<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>4. Augusta</td>
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<td>California</td>
<td>5. Austin</td>
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<td>Colorado</td>
<td>6. Baton Rouge</td>
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<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>7. Bismarck</td>
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<td>Delaware</td>
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<td>18. Dover</td>
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<td>25. Jackson</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>50. Trenton</td>
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THE GREAT SEAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH

There are two sides of the great seal. The obverse (front) side shows the Roman goddess Virtus dressed as an Amazon representing the genius of the Commonwealth. She has one foot on the form of Tyranny. Virginia’s motto, Sic Semper Tyrannis (Thus always to Tyrants), appears at the bottom. On the reverse (back) side are three Roman goddesses, Libertas (Liberty), Aeternitas (Eternity), and Ceres (Fruitfulness). At the top is the word “Perseverando” (by Persevering).

The flag of the Commonwealth has a deep blue field with a circular white center. Within the circle is the coat of arms of the Commonwealth.
Find and circle each word from the word list. They are in the box forward, backward, up, down and diagonally.

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Session
Jamestown
Bill
General Assembly
Senator
Delegate
Governor
Election
Clerk
Chamber
Adjourn
Nay

Debate
Williamsburg
Vote
Amendment
Represent
Preside
Term
Committee
Citizen Legislature
Capitol
Page

Law
Richmond
Convene
Floor
Calendar
Engross
Patron
Code
Messenger
Press
Yea
MATCH THE EMBLEMS OF VIRGINIA WITH THE YEAR IN WHICH THEY WERE ADOPTED.

___ The Cardinal 1. 1991
___ The American Dogwood (Tree) 2. 1982
___ The American Dogwood (Flower) 3. 2005
___ The American Foxhound 4. 2011
___ The Chesapeake Bay Deadrise 5. 1966
___ Square Dancing 6. 1950
___ The Tiger Swallowtail Butterfly 7. 1993
___ The Brook Trout 8. 1991
___ The Striped Bass 9. 1974
___ The Oyster Shell 10. 1956
___ The Big-Eared Bat 11. 1993
___ Chesapeckten Jeffersonius 12. 1918
___ Milk 13. 1988

What best symbolizes Virginia? Write out in the space below what you think should be the next official emblem of Virginia.
**Page 8: The Steps of a Bill**

7, 2, 5, 1, 3, 4, 6

1. Sign the bill into law, Amend the bill, or Veto the bill
2. Committee of Conference, Conference Report

**Page 12-13: Senate Chamber**

A. 4 D. 8 G. 6 J.2
B. 10 E. 5 H. 9 K. 11
C. 3 F. 1 I. 7

**Page 14-15: House Chamber**

A. 8 D. 5 G. 2
B. 7 E. 6 H. 4
C. 1 F. 3

**Page 23: Crossword**

**Across**
1. Jefferson
2. Amend
3. Term
4. Washington
5. Mason
6. Vote
7. Law
8. Milk
9. Patron
10. Square Dancing
11. Veto
12. Delegate

**Down**
1. Jamestown
2. Seal
3. Senator
4. Richmond
5. Page
6. Cardinal
7. Commonwealth
8. Preside
9. Eight
10. Wilder
11. Dog
12. Convene

**Page 24: Matching States and Capitals**

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Page 26: Word Sleuth

Page 27: Match the Emblems

1950  The Cardinal
1956  The American Dogwood (Tree)
1918  The American Dogwood (Flower)
1966  The American Foxhound
1988  The Chesapeake Bay Deadrise
1991  Square Dancing
1991  The Tiger Swallowtail Butterfly
1993  The Brook Trout
2011  The Striped Bass
1974  The Oyster Shell
2005  The Big-Eared Bat
1993  Chesapecten Jeffersonius
1982  Milk
A Look at the Virginia Government on the Internet!

Virginia General Assembly
Capitol Classroom, Bill Status, Virtual Capitol Tour, "Who's My Legislator" and more!
http://virginiageneralassembly.gov

Commonwealth of Virginia
http://www.virginia.gov

Produced by the Senate Clerk’s Office
Susan Clarke Schaar, Clerk of the Senate

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