

Discussion and activities

1. Complete the Statements

Work in pairs or small groups to complete the following statements. The information you need can be found in the previous pages.

1. We need laws because ...
2. Parliament makes the laws, and the judiciary ...
3. When a bill passes through its second stage, the next stage is ...
4. Most bills that Parliament considers come from ...
5. The stages are called "readings" because ...
6. Parliament makes laws on behalf of ...
7. The public can make suggestions for how a bill should be changed by ...
8. At a Standing Committee, members of Parliament make ...
9. A bill becomes an Act after ...
10. When a bill has passed through all its stages it becomes an ...

2. Organise and Group

Copy the grid into your books.

Types of Bill	Second reading	Committees	Third reading	Assent

All the words and phrases below relate to how Parliament makes laws. Discuss their meanings with your group or partner. Group the words under the five headings. Some words will belong under more than one heading.

final debate, views of the public, approval, recommendations, main debate, Government Bill, Act of Parliament, amendments, reviewed

3. Try This

With your partner or group, make a list of laws that affect your daily life. Consider, for example, laws that apply when you are at home, walking to school, at school, travelling on public transport, attending sports functions, going shopping, and exploring the outdoors.

Why do we have these laws? What happens if they are not followed?

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DISCOVER Parliament



Parliament Sitting

How Does Parliament Make Laws?

What would life be like if there were no laws? Think of some of the ways that laws affect you. For example, laws say you must go to school; they say when you can drive a car or if a shop sells you something, it must work and a law says you can't take something from the market without paying for it.

These laws, and many others, affect our lives and the lives of all Fijians every day. All of these laws are made by Parliament. In fact, much of Parliament's work involves making laws and changing laws.



A Standing Committee considering a Bill

Why do we need laws?

Every social group – even a group of friends – has rules. Often these rules are not written down or even discussed, but they are there just the same.

The laws that Parliament makes are rules for the whole country. Laws protect our rights, our property, and us. They also spell out what happens if people break them. The easiest way to understand why we have laws is to imagine what our lives would be like if there were no laws.

Although Parliament makes our laws, the courts and judges (called “the judiciary”) decide how they should be interpreted. If people break laws, there are usually consequences depending on how the laws are interpreted.

In a democratic system such as ours, we give authority to our representatives in Parliament to make laws on our behalf, and we expect that these laws will be well thought out and fair.

Where Do Ideas For New Laws Come From?

Most ideas for new laws come from the Government, but ideas for new laws can come about in a variety of ways. Ideas can come from people inside or outside Parliament. Sometimes new laws are needed because changes have taken place in society that existing laws don’t cover. Sometimes existing laws need updating.

A proposal for a new law is called a “Bill”. Once a bill has been “introduced” to Parliament, it goes through several stages of being looked at and discussed. If a majority of the members agree with the bill, it then receives the President’s assent before becoming an Act of Parliament (or an amendment to an Act) and passing into law.

Government Bills

Government Bills deal with a whole range of matters such as income tax, social welfare, the education system, and the health system. The Minister responsible for the area introduces the Bill to the House. For example, the Minister of Education would introduce a Bill that concerns education.

Private Bills

Members of Parliament who are not Ministers can also put forward Bills.

THAT’S INTERESTING

For almost 4 decades since Independence, our Parliament had two houses. The Lower House or House of Representatives had elected members and Upper House or Senate which was modelled on Britain’s House of Lords. Members of the Senate were appointed, not elected as in the House of Representatives. The Constitution prescribes a single house Parliament (unicameral legislature), made up by only elected members and provision of an unelected member in terms of appointing an Attorney-General (for more information see Section 96 of the Constitution).



Parliament Education initiatives

DID YOU KNOW ?

The term “reading” dates back to the days of the early British Parliaments, when the Speaker or Clerk (Secretary- General) would actually read bills out loud to the members of Parliament. They did this because there was only one copy of the bill and also because some members could not read. In Fiji today, the Secretary-General only reads the Bill’s title out loud at each stage, although it is still called a “reading”.

How Does A Bill Become Law?

A bill must pass through several stages (by members voting) before it can become law

1. FIRST READING

First reading of the bill and passed without debate.

2. SECOND READING

Bill is read the second time and debates is on the principles and merits of the Bill.

3. STANDING COMMITTEE

A Standing Committee carefully considers the bill. They read and listen to the views of the public and interested organisations, recommend amendments (changes), and report back to the whole Parliament. This may take six months.

4. COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE PARLIAMENT

MPs debate the bill clause by clause in a detailed examination. This is the last opportunity for MPs to make changes to the bill.

5. THIRD READING

In this final debate, MPs look at the bill as a whole and consider what will happen if the bill becomes law.

6. ASSENT

The President signs the bill agreeing that it should become an Act of Parliament and pass into law. The Bill will be taken to have been assented if the President does not provide his or her assent within 7 days.

Note

A Bill may proceed more quickly (without proceeding through all the stages mentioned above) if the mover requests to the Parliament and the majority of the MPs votes in support of the request (see Standing Orders 51).



DID YOU KNOW ?

The Mace represents the authority of the Speaker in the Parliament. It sits on the central table with the Crown pointing to the Government side of the chamber for as long as long as the House is officially sitting except when the Committee of the Whole meets it is placed on the lower brackets of the central table.

THAT’S INTERESTING

A ministerial system of government was introduced in Fiji in 1967 and Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was appointed as the Chief Minister with the Executive Council of the Legislative Council becoming a Council of Ministers.

HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED

The origin of Bills goes back hundreds of years. If one of the early British Parliaments decided something was wrong, it would petition the King, asking him to take action.

If the King and his council agreed, they wrote a reply to Parliament.

This reply became a statute, or law, set by Parliament.

Over time, Parliament became more of a legislative or lawmaking body.

Members of Parliament began drafting new laws themselves and sending the drafts, instead of the petitions, to the King.