

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS, CHALLENGES IN DIVERSITY: LEGISLATIVE TRENDS AND POWER SHARING AMONG HISPANIC AMERICANS IN CONGRESS, 1977–2012

LESSON PLAN FOUR



RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL: Grades 7 to 12



OVERVIEW

This activity is designed to accompany the contextual essay “Strength in Numbers, Challenges in Diversity: Legislative Trends and Power Sharing Among Hispanic Americans in Congress, 1977–2012,” from the *Hispanic Americans in Congress* website, history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/HAIC/Hispanic-Americans-in-Congress/. Students have the opportunity to learn more about the Hispanic Americans who served in Congress from 1977 to 2012. Students are encouraged to analyze the roles Hispanic-American Delegates, Representatives, Resident Commissioners, and Senators played in Congress during this era, as well as the ways in which they may have changed the institution.



CURRICULUM CONNECTION

- U.S. History, American Government, Social Studies, Latino Studies
- Civil Rights Movement, Voting Rights and Redistricting, Cold War



OBJECTIVES

1. Students should be able to identify the Hispanic Americans who served in Congress from 1977 to 2012.
2. Students should be able to recognize the ways in which Hispanic Americans won elective office from 1977 to 2012.
3. Students should be able to identify important issues and trends surrounding the Hispanic Americans who served in Congress during this era.



LESSON PLAN

1. To help introduce students to the upcoming activity, lead a brief discussion using the questions below:
 - a. What were some of the important issues and events in the United States from 1977 to 2012?
 - b. If asked to describe an average Member of Congress during this period, how would you answer?
 - c. Have there been many Hispanic Americans who have served in Congress? (Ask students to compile a quick list.) Why or why not?
2. Ask students to read the contextual essay “Strength in Numbers, Challenges in Diversity: Legislative Trends and Power Sharing Among Hispanic Americans in Congress, 1977–2012,” either independently or in groups. Encourage students to take notes and to write down any unanswered questions they encounter during the reading.
3. Once students have completed the reading, have them answer the **Comprehension Questions**. Review the answers as a class.
4. Next have students answer the **Critical Thinking Questions**. Review the answers as a class.
5. Choose one of the options listed under the category **Main Exercise** (Cooperative or Hypothetical). If necessary, students can use the online resources listed at the end of the activity to complete the **Main Exercise**.
6. Time permitting, conduct one of the **Suggested Extended Activities**.



COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS ON THE SURFACE

1. What year did Hispanic Members of Congress form the Congressional Hispanic Caucus? What year did they form the Congressional Hispanic Conference? What is the difference between these organizations? Why did Hispanic Members of Congress form these groups? Why did the formation of the groups mark important milestones?
2. Who was the first Hispanic-American woman elected to Congress? How many other Hispanic women have followed this individual into Congress?
3. What role did the Voting Rights Act (and its subsequent extensions) play in Hispanic Americans' efforts to win election to congressional office? What background did individuals from this era typically have in state and local politics—and did it differentiate them from other generations of Hispanics in Congress?
4. Name two factors that contributed to the rapid rise in the numbers of Hispanic Americans in Congress during this period.
5. Name at least two major legislative issues affecting Hispanic-American Members during this era.
6. Name one instance in which individuals within the Congressional Hispanic Caucus differed over a bill or major national issue debated in Congress.
7. New Mexico and Puerto Rico sent significant numbers of Hispanic Members to Congress in previous eras. List three states or territories that sent Hispanic Members to Congress for the first time during this era (1977–2012).



CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS DIGGING DEEPER

1. How do you think the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s paved the way for the changing role of Hispanic Americans in politics in the 20th century? Provide two examples to support your answer.
2. Compare and contrast the congressional careers of John Salazar of Colorado and Ben Garrido Blaz of Guam (Make sure to discuss tenure, legislation, committees, legislative style/approach, and basic background such as the territory or state in which each man served).
3. What role did Hispanic-American Members play in promoting civil rights legislation from this era? How did they balance outside pressures with the institutional pathways of Congress?
4. How do you think the pre-congressional experiences of Hispanic Members from this era may have contributed to the eventual formation of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and/or Conference?
5. What do you think was the single most important advancement for Hispanic Americans in Congress during this period? Explain your answer.



MAIN EXERCISE OPTION 1: COOPERATIVE

Working in small groups, choose a Hispanic Member of Congress from this era and follow the directions below:

- a. Read the profile for your Member.
- b. Write down any important notes.
- c. Scenario: You have been assigned the task of designing a museum exhibit to describe the life of your Member. The exhibit should include information on all aspects of his or her life, but should focus on the Member's congressional service.

What should be included:

- Original title of exhibit that helps explain his or her legacy
- 50-word exhibit label that summarizes his or her congressional career
- Three artifacts chosen by you that best represent the Member’s legacy
- A creative teaching tool for museum visitors that covers the highlights of his or her career in Congress (committees, key legislation, state or district he or she represented, etc.)

OPTION 2: HYPOTHETICAL

1. You are a longtime staff assistant for a Hispanic Member from this era. Prepare and deliver a five-minute speech for a district event detailing the Member’s career and significant accomplishments. Make sure to provide an insider’s perspective on his or her daily activities based on your observations as a member of his or her staff.
2. You are a Hispanic-American committee chairman during the 1990s at the height of the debate about bilingual education programs. Take one of the two following positions:
 - a. You support preserving the programs. Write a 300–400 word floor speech (for the House or Senate) in which you try to persuade your colleagues to support your position and encourage them to vote for you.
 - b. You support curtailing the programs. Write a 300–400 word floor speech (for the House or Senate) in which you try to persuade your colleagues to support your position and encourage them to vote for you.

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SUGGESTED EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. Design a timeline of significant events for the Hispanic-American Members of Congress who served during this era.
2. Track voting records of Hispanic Members on key issues of the period (e.g., border control and immigration, bilingual education, voting rights).
3. Design a campaign website for a Hispanic candidate for Congress during this period.
4. Draft language for a resolution sponsored by a Hispanic-American Member of Congress in the 1990s on one of two hypothetical topics:
 - a. Supporting or opposing the North American Free Trade Agreement in your district or state
 - b. Expanding voting resources for bilingual U.S. citizens



ONLINE RESOURCES

History, Art & Archives | U.S. House of Representatives

A collaborative project between the Office of the Historian and the Clerk of the House's Office of Art and Archives. Together, the offices serve as the House's institutional memory, and a resource for Members, staff, and the general public.

history.house.gov

[@USHouseHistory](#)

Online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*

Searchable database that contains biographical information on every person who served in Congress.

bioguide.congress.gov

Senate Historical Office

Includes information on the history and art of the U.S. Senate such as facts and milestones, historical statistics, featured biographies, and a photographic collection.

senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Senate_Historical_Office.htm

Congress.gov | Library of Congress

Searchable database of congressional legislation from 1973 to present (bill text and roll call votes are available from 1989 to present).

congress.gov

GPO Federal Digital System

Includes links for searchable databases of the *Congressional Record* and *House Journal* (1994 to present) as well as information on how to find the nearest federal depository library.

gpo.gov/fdsys