



# Democracy for Brownies

**D**id you know that the president of the United States is only one part of the government? In this country, lots of people work together to decide what rules are made and how they are followed. All of those people make up our government. When you turn 18, you can help choose them by voting in elections!

## Steps

1. Find out about local government
2. Find out about state government
3. Find out about our country's legislative branch
4. Find out about our country's executive branch
5. Find out about our country's judicial branch

## Purpose

**When I've earned this badge, I will know the three branches of government—and some of the things they are responsible for.**



## Town Hall Meetings

The purpose of town hall meetings is for government officials to hear the community's views on public issues. People attending the meeting have the chance to present ideas, voice their opinions, and ask questions. Meetings don't necessarily take place in a town hall—they may be held at the local library or a school building.

# STEP 1 Find out about local government

Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more!

The people who make the rules in your city or town are called the local government. Even the smallest town has one! Learn more about your local government in this step.

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

**Visit your town hall, city hall, or mayor's office.** Take a field trip with your friends or family and talk to someone there about your local government. Have them explain all the jobs that are done in your local government and talk about how laws are made to run your city or town. Write down some questions before you go. Ask any other questions you can think of while you're there.

OR

**Talk to an expert.** With help from an adult, find an expert who can talk to you about your local government. This could be someone elected to local office, a teacher, a lawyer, or a judge. Have them explain all the jobs that are done in your local government and talk about how laws are made to run your city or town. Ask any other questions you can think of.

OR

**Go to a city or town hall meeting.** With help from an adult, make a plan to go to a meeting—or watch one online—when a vote will be held. Before the meeting, talk about what will be voted on and decide how you would vote if you could. See how the vote turns out, then talk about it with your family or friends.



## STEP 2 Find out about state government

State governments and the United States government are all made up of three parts. These parts are called the branches of government. You can imagine the government like a tree with three branches on it. Start by reading about the three parts in the box on this page.

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

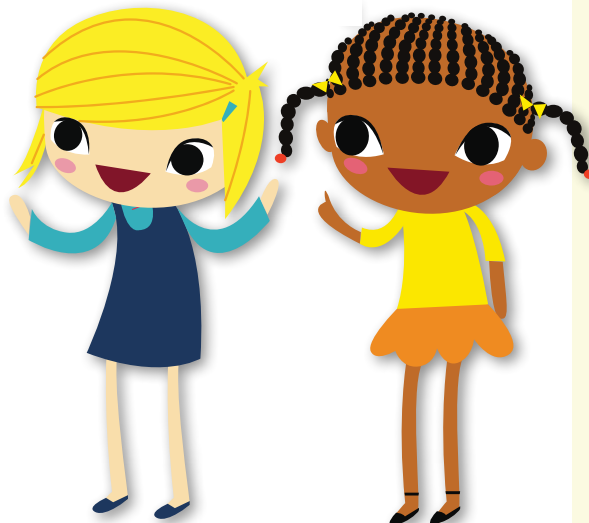
**Visit your state capitol building.** Take a field trip with your friends or family and talk to someone there about how your state government works. How do people in the different parts of government work together? Before you go, write down questions—ask your friends and family what questions they have too! Then, ask any other questions you can think of while you're there.

OR

**Find out about your mayor and governor.** With help from an adult, learn about the jobs of a mayor and governor. Who is the mayor of the closest big city, and who is your governor? How do they work together? Talk about what each person is responsible for, then draw pictures of some of these jobs.

OR

**Learn about laws.** With help from an adult, find out about a rule or law that's different in your state from some other states. (For example, it's illegal for drivers to pump their own gas in the state of New Jersey.) How or why did the law get made?



## Three Branches of Government

The United States government—and the government for all of the states—is broken into three parts, or branches. The government is divided in this way to make sure that power is shared, so no part has too much.



The **legislative** branch makes laws.



The **executive** branch makes sure the law is carried out.



The **judicial** branch decides what the law means if there are questions.

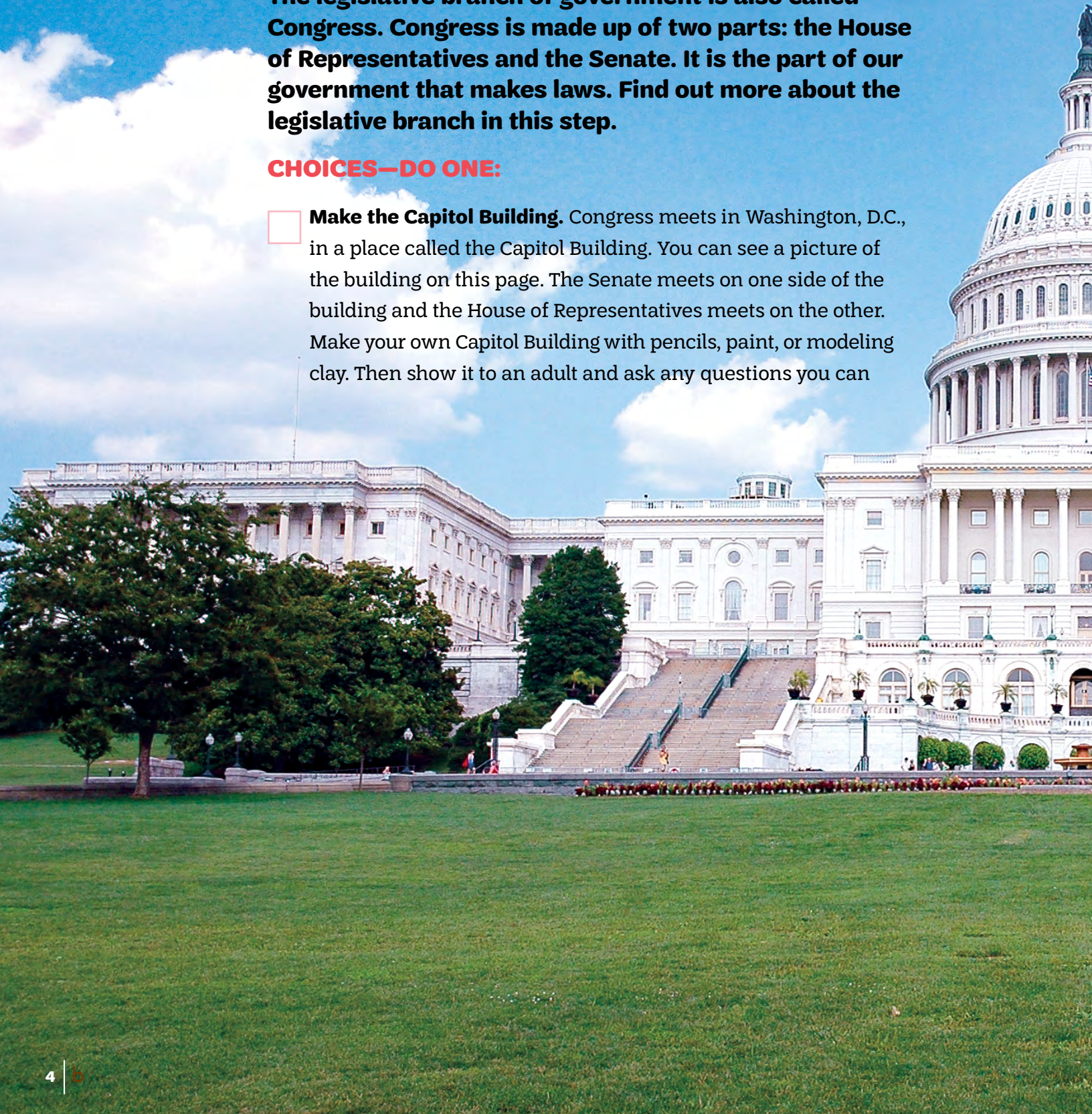
STEP  
**3** Find out about  
our country's  
legislative branch



The legislative branch of government is also called Congress. Congress is made up of two parts: the House of Representatives and the Senate. It is the part of our government that makes laws. Find out more about the legislative branch in this step.


**CHOICES—DO ONE:**

- Make the Capitol Building.** Congress meets in Washington, D.C., in a place called the Capitol Building. You can see a picture of the building on this page. The Senate meets on one side of the building and the House of Representatives meets on the other. Make your own Capitol Building with pencils, paint, or modeling clay. Then show it to an adult and ask any questions you can




think of. For example: Who are your state's two United States senators? How many representatives does your state have? What kinds of issues are important to some of them?

**OR**

 **Write a letter to a United States representative or senator.** With help from an adult, find out about some of the people who represent your state in Congress. Then, either on your own or with your Girl Scout friends, decide on an issue that's important to you and write a letter to a representative or senator.

**OR**

 **Visit the local office of a United States representative or senator.** Plan a field trip to visit one of their local offices and talk to someone there. (You'll need help from an adult, of course!) What issues are most important to this senator or representative? How are they helping kids in your state? Ask any other questions you may think of about the kind of work they do.



We the People

STEP  
**4 Find out about our country's executive branch**



## The Constitution

The Constitution of the United States is one of the most important documents in United States history. It was written to explain the rules of the country and signed by the country's Founding Fathers in 1787. The Constitution explains the three branches of government and the rights granted to citizens of the country. It is called a "living" document because the Constitution is not perfect. When it was written, they knew that it would have to be improved. The writers added a way to make changes. These changes are called amendments. There have been 27 amendments to the Constitution since it was written more than 200 years ago.

**The head of the executive branch of government is the president. Starting at age 18, American citizens can vote for president every four years. Learn more about presidents in this step.**

**CHOICES—DO ONE:**

**Hold a pretend presidential election.** With a group of friends or family, decide how to hold your election. You don't need to vote on candidates running for president—you can choose silly things like a dog versus a cat or cake versus pie. Break into teams and make campaign signs and speeches for your "candidate." Then, vote by secret ballot to choose a winner.

**OR**

**Interview an older family member.** Find out which president has meant the most to them in their lifetime and why. If you can, interview more than one person in your family. Did they choose the same president? Do they have different reasons for their choice?

**OR**

**Read books about presidents.** With help from an adult, find two kids' books about historical presidents. Read the books together and talk about them. If you were president, what kinds of things would be important to you? Are there changes you would want to make?

STEP

# 5 Find out about our country's judicial branch



The judicial branch of the government is made up of courts and judges. With help from an adult, find an expert who can talk to you and answer questions about the judicial branch.

## CHOICES—DO ONE:

**Talk to a lawyer.** Find out about what they do. How do lawyers help people understand laws? What happens if people do not follow laws? Ask any other questions you may have.

OR

**Talk to a judge.** Find out about what they do. How does the judicial branch work with the other two branches of government? What's the difference between local courts and the Supreme Court? How does a case make it to the Supreme Court? Ask any other questions you may have.

OR

**Talk to a social studies, history, or civics teacher.** Find out how they teach their students about the judicial branch. How does the judicial branch work with the other two branches of government? Ask any other questions you may have.

## The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court, which is sometimes called “The Highest Court in the Land,” is made up of nine people called justices. For a long time, these justices were all men. That changed in

**1981**, when the first woman was appointed to the Supreme Court by President Ronald Reagan. Her name was **Sandra Day O'Connor**, and you have something in common with her. **She was a Girl Scout too!**



**Now that I've earned this badge,  
I can give service by:**

- Helping a Daisy make a drawing or model of the Capitol Building
- Holding a pretend presidential election with my friends
- Telling my classmates about the three branches of government



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***I'm inspired to:***

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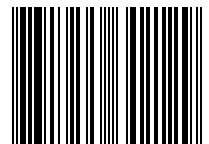
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