

**TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT**  
***Lesson Title -Congressional Decision Making and the Dream Act***  
***From Betsy Kowal***

Grade – 12

Length of class period – 1-2 45 minute periods, depending on pre-reading requirements

Inquiry – (What essential question are students answering, what problem are they solving, or what decision are they making?)

*What factors affect how Congresspersons act on legislation?*

**Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)**

1. Analyze the demographics of the current Congress (111th)
2. Discuss questions related to the statistics
3. Evaluate the various roles played by Congresspersons
4. Debate a current issue which would have relevance to students (DREAM Act)
5. Summarize reasons for their "vote" on the issue

**Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson?) – (please attach)**

- 111th Congress Demographics and questions (attached) Teacher would need to update statistics as each session of Congress begins
- Vocabulary related to Congressional roles: legislator, delegate, trustee, partisan, politico
- Herszenhorn, David M. *Reid Trying Again on Immigration Bill*. The Politics and Government Blog of the New York Times.  
<http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/17/reid-trying-again-on-immigration-bill/> (article attached)
- *The DREAM Act Illegal Alien Amnesty: A Bad Idea at the Worst Possible Time, Says FAIR*. (attached)  
[http://www.fairus.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=20209&security=1601&news\\_iv\\_ctrl=1741](http://www.fairus.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=20209&security=1601&news_iv_ctrl=1741)
- **Letters to President Barack Obama urging passage of the DREAM Act. (attached)**  
August 11, 2010 Ivan Nikolov  
September 8, 2010 Chih Tsung Kao

September 13, 2010 Gaby Pacheco  
September 17, 2010 Laura Lopez

**Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)**

1. Have students work with a partner and complete the Congressional Demographics sheet (questions 1-8)
2. Discuss student responses.
3. Give basic background information on the DREAM Act. Answer questions students may have. Solicit opinions as to the merit and potential impact of the Act from students.
4. Divide students into groups to read and discuss the articles. Give one group *Reid Trying Again on Immigration Bill*, give the other group copies of *The DREAM Act Illegal Alien Amnesty: A Bad Idea at the Worst Possible Time, Says FAIR*. Or, have students read both articles. Make a T-chart and note the pros and cons of the Act.
5. Distribute the letters amongst the class. Ask students for first impressions of the illegal immigrants and their situations. What stereotypes have been broken by these letters?
6. Discuss the DREAM Act legislation in light of the letters. Should the DREAM Act become law? Why or why not? Is it an effective solution to the dilemmas highlighted by the writers?
7. Ask students to assume the role of a congressperson. Would their vote on the DREAM Act be based primarily on the wishes of their constituents, national interest, party pressures, or their conscience?

**How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?**

Exit slip: What factors influenced their congressional vote (decision)? How would their status as seniors in high school, applying to college, affect their personal decision on the DREAM Act?

**Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –**

Compare and contrast various American beliefs, values and political Ideologies

Assess the significance of the evolving heterogeneity of American society

Analyze laws that have been modified to meet society's changing values and needs

Evaluate a proposed solution to a contemporary political, economic, geographic/environmental or social problem

## 111<sup>th</sup> Congress Demographics

Use the profiles of the current Congress to help in answering the questions that follow.

### Political Affiliation:

	<u>Senate</u>	<u>House</u>
Democrat	58	258
Republican	40	177
Independent	2	0

**Average Age:**                      61.7                      56

<b>Gender:</b>	<u>Senate</u>	<u>House</u>
Male	83	360
Female	17	75

<b>Race &amp; Ethnicity:</b>	<u>Senate</u>	<u>House</u>
Hispanic	1	27
Asian	2	5
Native American	0	1
African American	1	42
Middle Eastern	0	3

<b>Religion:</b>	<u>Congress</u>
Jewish	45
Mormon	16
Quaker	1
Muslim	2
Buddhist	2
Protestant	295
Catholic	163
Atheist	1
Unknown	10

<b>Occupation: (Incomplete)</b>	<u>Congress</u>
Public Service/Politics	214
Law	225
Business	201
Education	94
Healthcare	24
Agriculture	9
Carpenters	3

Bank teller	2
Prison Guard	1
Tugboat Captain	1
Hotel Clerk	1

<b>Education:</b>	<u>Senate</u>	<u>House</u>
Ph.D	0	23
Law Degree	57	168
Medical Degree	3	17
Masters	16	83
Associates	0	5
High School	1	27

**Military Service:** 121 veterans in Congress

1. In a sentence, state at least 6 characteristics of a typical representative in Congress.
2. List three groups of people who might have reason to question whether or not the House of Representatives adequately represents their interests.
3. How does this chart illustrate the need for a representative to keep in close touch with constituents?
4. Both the late Edward Kennedy and Jay Rockefeller are from wealthy families, yet they support social reforms to help lower classes. Why do you think these men champion causes from which they derive no direct benefit?
5. What does the example in the question above tell you about the need to elect someone of the same statistical profile as the majority in the district in order to gain good representation?

6. How does racial and ethnic diversity differ between the House and the Senate? Why is there a difference?
  
7. Do the members of Congress adequately reflect a cross section of the American people today? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Give three reasons that senators seem to have more prestige than representatives.

Congressmen constantly face conflicting pressures in voting. They must represent their constituents, satisfy their party, do what is best for the country as a whole and still act in a manner their conscience tells them is right. Read the following situations and then decide how you would vote if you were the Congressman.

1. Imagine you are a congressman from a large northern city. You are confronted with a vote on farm relief sponsored by your own party. The president is of the opposite party and opposes farm relief. Would your vote be based primarily on the wishes of your constituents, national interest, party pressures, or your conscience? Explain your vote.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Imagine you are a congressman from a rural area. You are confronted with a vote on a defense contract for a large corporation that is planning to build a factory in your district. Your party is split on the issue. Would your vote be based primarily on the wishes of your constituents, national interest, party pressures, or your conscience? Explain your vote.

### **Background Information on the Dream Act**

The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (The “DREAM Act”) was first introduced in the U.S. Senate on August 1, 2001. Recently re-introduced in the Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives on March 26, 2009. This bill would provide certain illegal and deportable alien students the opportunity to earn conditional permanent residency under certain conditions. Immigrants may qualify by meeting the following requirements (not yet finalized by Congress) 1. Be between the ages of 12 and 35 at the time the law is enacted; 2. Have proof they arrived in the US before the age of 16 and proof of residence in the US for a minimum of 5 consecutive years since their arrival; 3. Graduated from American high school or obtained a GED; 4. Be in compliance with the Selective Service; 5. Be of good moral character. Qualified illegal immigrant students would also be entitled to apply for student loans, work study, and in-state tuition.

November 17, 2010, 7:02 pm

### **Reid Trying Again on Immigration Bill**

By [DAVID M. HERSZENHORN](#)

The Senate majority leader, [Harry Reid](#) of Nevada, said on Wednesday that he would try to bring up a bill that would create a path to citizenship for certain illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as small children.

Mr. Reid tried to attach the legislation as an amendment to a big military policy bill before the midterm elections, but Republicans blocked the bill in part because they said the Democratic leader was using it as a political prop.

During his re-election campaign in Nevada, Mr. Reid said he would try again to pass the legislation, known as the Dream Act. And in a [Twitter](#) message on Wednesday evening, his office said he would try to do so in the current session as a stand-alone bill.

The House speaker, [Nancy Pelosi](#) of California, has been discussing the [immigration](#) measure with Democratic colleagues but has not yet scheduled a vote on it, a spokesman said.

The legislation would give legal residency to immigrants who arrived in the United States before age 16 and resided here for at least five years, graduated from high school and completed two years of college or military service. They would be subject to background checks, could not have a criminal record, and even if successful would still not be eligible for benefits like Pell grant scholarships.

In a statement, Mr. Reid said: “If there is a bipartisan bill that makes sense for our country economically, from a national security perspective and one that reflects American values, it is the Dream Act. This bill will give children brought illegally to this country at no fault of their own the chance to earn legal status. Children brought to this country before the age of 16 who graduate high school, stay out of trouble and go on to serve in the military or to college would be eligible to earn permanent resident status after meeting certain other requirements.”

Mr. Reid noted that the legislation has enjoyed bipartisan support in the past and that he hoped it would again, now that the campaign season has ended.

“Secretaries of defense from both parties have supported this bill because it strengthens our Armed Forces,” Mr. Reid said in his statement. In fact, this bill has a long history of bipartisan support, and was originally co-authored by Republicans. The students who earn legal status through the Dream Act will make our country more competitive economically, spurring job creation, contributing to our tax base and strengthening communities.”

### ***The DREAM Act Illegal Alien Amnesty: A Bad Idea at the Worst Possible Time, Says FAIR***

(Washington, D.C. March 27, 2009) Despite overwhelming opposition by the American public when it was first proposed in 2000, the House and the Senate have reintroduced a sweeping illegal alien amnesty bill known as the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act.

The legislation, introduced by Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) and Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), is a broad amnesty measure disguised as an educational initiative that would allow millions of illegal aliens who meet a very loose definition of “student” to qualify for green cards. In addition, it provides in-state tuition benefits for illegal aliens that will displace legal residents competing for a fixed number of college admission slots and taxpayer subsidies.

The DREAM Act represents yet another attempt to enact an amnesty for illegal aliens, either in one comprehensive bill, or piecemeal. The DREAM Act would also place severe strains on state budgets and harm middle class families who are struggling to get their own kids through college.

Passage of the DREAM Act would:

- Reward parents who violated immigration laws through their children, and provide a powerful incentive for more illegal immigration.
- Transfer seats and tuition subsidies to illegal aliens at a time when state higher education budgets are being slashed, admissions curtailed, and tuitions increased.
- By broadly defining "student" it gives amnesty to large numbers of illegal aliens who may be pursuing any sort of education.
- Accelerate chain migration and exponential population growth because illegal aliens who are granted green cards will be able to petition the Department of Homeland Security in the future to grant their parents and relatives legal status too.

"Once again, Congress is ignoring the interests and concerns of hard-working, law-abiding Americans in order to reward illegal immigrants and pander to the illegal alien lobby," said Dan Stein, president of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). "Even as American families are struggling, and nearly every state is facing a budget crisis, Congress is prepared to mandate huge additional burdens in the form of a massive illegal alien amnesty."

"The American people have made it very clear that they reject amnesty for illegal aliens whether it's in one comprehensive bill, or piecemeal," Stein said. "The DREAM Act would not only allow millions of newly legalized illegal aliens to compete for their jobs, but allow them to compete for their own children's educational opportunities. With private university tuitions already out of reach for most middle class families, and tuitions at public universities rising three times faster than median family incomes, the DREAM Act would be more than a reward for illegal aliens. It would crush the hopes and dreams of countless American families trying to provide opportunities to their own children."

## Letter One

September 17, 2010

Dear Mr. President,

My name is Laura López and I am an undocumented resident of Napa, California. My parents brought me in 1989 to provide for me the American Dream. I was a year and eight months old. The plan was that they'd work and I'd study and go to college. Our hard work was supposed to merit us the American Dream. But my merit would be questioned for a lack of legal documentation.

In 7th grade I joined Talent Search, a community college program promoting higher education. With them I planned my high school classes based on the track towards the University of

California. I worked hard through the honors courses and passed the Advanced Placements tests. I completed community service hours with the honor society and competed with the dance team in San Diego, Reno, and Disney World. I did it all to get to college. As a senior in high school I learned of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26: "Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit". I believed it then, and I believe it now.

I merited the acceptance letters and chose Santa Cruz. But my high school counselor and Talent Search mentor did not mention that if you are undocumented, you must file the Assembly Bill 540 Non-resident Tuition Exemption Form or pay out-of-state tuition. Perhaps it didn't cross their minds that I could be undocumented and that AB540 was a determinant factor in my American Dream. Although I had lived in the same town for all but a year of my life I could be considered a non-resident student if weren't for that bill. If it weren't for late Assemblyperson Marco Firebaugh bill, I could not have afforded college; I would not have graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz, with a B.A. in Latin American and Latino Studies, Cum Laude, and a minor in Legal Studies. But, you may be asking Mr. President, what of life after college as an undocumented graduate with honors? Without a pathway to legalization, no merit of mine seems to matter. I have a great degree with which I could help the ever growing Latino population (citizens, permanent residents, and undocumented folks), but I cannot use it. I cannot get a job. Don't get me wrong, I love volunteering because it is necessary, but I need a job.

Folks who demand to 'do it the legal way' and 'wait in line' process may not realize that I am in line. If the system ran smoothly my wait is 12 years. Due to the application backlog my real wait is more like 18 years. At this pace, another generation will be born and graduate high school before I am eligible for a 'green card'. I may be in that line, but I am not willing to wait what seems a life time to live my own dreams. I am one of the 21 students who did the sit-in lobbying for the DREAM Act on July 20th. And as Senator Reid's, Feinstein's, Menendez's, Schumer's, and McCain's offices as my witnesses, us DREAMers will do all that it takes to pass the DREAM Act Now!

It is urgent the DREAM Act passes because the current immigration system is inefficient. My parents became Legal Permanent Residents (LPR) in September, 2004 and applied for me that December. You may wonder, Mr. President, why if my parents are residents since 2004 I am not. I must explain a little of the immigration process. If your parent is at least a Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) s/he can petition for you. A United States Citizen sibling can petition for you once s/he turns 21. I am the oldest so I had to wait for my parents to become LPRs. Without a pathway to legalization the petition my parents' filed for me will be denied. I'll be placed into deportation proceedings. Upon this happening, I could qualify for cancellation of removal if I meet the following requirements. One, have lived in the U.S. for at least 10 years (check mark). Two, have a good moral character (check mark). And three, and most difficult to prove, my sponsor (parent) would suffer extreme and unusual hardship if I were deported (not likely by immigration standards).

In my family's case, my parents' were able to become residents because my sister was born with hypophosphatemic rickets, a condition that requires life long vitamin supplements and corrective surgery too costly to be done without medical insurance and too extensive and painful to be done without your parents' support. Thus, when my parents' were denied their petition in 1997, the attorney filed for cancellation of removal and was able to prove that my sister would suffer 'extreme and unusual hardship' without them. According to the immigration process, my sister could not petition for me since she was not 21 years old, nor would she 'suffer' with my absence. And, so, my parents took the precaution of keeping me out of the petition rather than face the possibility of my deportation at just 10 years old.

So you see, I couldn't become a resident 10+ years ago and I may not become a resident in 18 years because the immigration system is terribly flawed. I understand that the political climate may not permit for a Comprehensive Immigration Reform. But the DREAM Act is the first step towards creating that right atmosphere. We all know that merit will be the foundation for Reform

as it is already the foundation for the DREAM Act. I merit my residency through the DREAM Act and the DREAM Act is my only hope. I have met all of the pre-requisites. I have met the requirement of graduating from college. I don't want my college education to remain in idle; I don't want my future to remain on hold any longer.

I will be celebrating my 23rd birthday in a couple of months. I hope to also celebrate passage of the DREAM Act. It is the only legislation that would allow me to see my life beyond the American Dream my parents foresaw two decades ago. We all need the DREAM Act Now!

Sincerely,  
Laura López

## Letter Two

September 13, 2010

Dear Mr. President,

I am a member of the first graduating class of Felix Varela Senior High which is located in Miami, Florida. I had attended school with my native-born friends. Like them, I participated in activities, field trips, dances, and felt the pain of losing a classmate.

It was around 10th grade that I realized my future after high school would not be the same as those of my peers even though I worked just as hard to obtain excellent grades. I understood that I was different. For over ten years I had been in hiding. For days I thought about coming out of the closet. I wanted to tell the whole world who I really was. I thought, "How would this affect the relationships with my friends?" "How would I be judged?" "How will my parents be affected?" I thought about it day and night, hoping that someone would help and wondering about the others, like me, out there.

It took a lot of courage, but one day in 10th grade I told everyone: I was an undocumented immigrant.

My teachers couldn't believe it. Some tried to help me, while others mocked me. I still remember one of my teachers yelling across the room, "Hey Pocahontas, why don't you get married?" Sadly, that is the only pathway to citizenship that ever seemed to be available, even after consultations with prestigious immigration lawyers.

Coming into the light had its benefits. Once I was out, I was able to explain my situation to college admissions personnel. In fact, there were several other undocumented students at my school who came to me and shared their secret. One made me promise to help him if I found a way to go to college. One day, I met a Miami Dade College recruiter who helped me enter college. Since then, I've earned three college degrees from MDC, and have represented my alma mater at both local and state levels as the Student Government Association president.

Still, coming out of the closet had its consequences. On July 26, 2006 there was a raid conducted at 6 a.m. in my home, and my parents and sister were detained. Fortunately, I acted quickly and was able to avoid detention. At first, I thought it was a mistake--a coincidence that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had come to my house. It wasn't. My family had to suffer consequences of my decision come out and become a human rights and student advocate. ICE hit me [where it hurt the most](#).

Even though my family is still at risk of being deported, I have worked with organizations that fight for immigrant rights and have kept my family close to me. I know I can count on my friends at the [Florida Immigrant Coalition](#), [Students Working for Equal Rights](#), and Miami Dade College to be the support I need in moments of weakness. Still, Mr. President, you recently told [La Opinión](#) "I am a strong ally, like none other has been in the Oval office." If that's true than why are immigrant

youth like [Saad Nabeel still being deported](#), and why are our families and communities still being torn apart? Why do so many of us have to live in fear?

What is fear and how do we conquer it? Earlier this year, myself and three other immigrant youth decided to try and conquer our fears by walking 1,500 miles from Miami to Washington, D.C. in support of the DREAM Act. On this walk, the [Trail of DREAMs](#), we conquered many fears. We have heard too many cases of people being detained for no apparent reason. Police are interrogating people and asking questions about immigration status because they have entered into 287(g) agreements with ICE, and are now acting as ICE agents. Once, we were stopped by the police--something that, in many cities, means potential deportation. Without hesitation, we calmly spoke to the police officer, told him what we were doing, and proudly handed him information about the walk. How did I do it without getting deported? Well, in part, because we are not alone. We are together in this struggle. We walk often with shirts that say "UNDOCUMENTED," and we do it proudly--because we are sending an important message: "We are humans too, and we cannot be ignored and exploited anymore."

When we finally arrived in Washington D.C. after months of walking, we tried to meet with you, President Obama, but you refused to do so because we were undocumented. What kind of "strong ally" is this? It is time that you stepped up for us Mr. President and worked to pass the DREAM Act. It is too late to pass comprehensive immigration reform, this year, but we still have a chance at passing the DREAM Act before the November elections. The DREAM Act is one step towards just and humane immigration reform. Once we pass it that will empower hundreds of thousands of immigrant youth to start working to better the lives of their family members. That's why it's time that you stepped up to help us make the DREAM Act happen, now. Tomorrow, you're [giving a back to school speech](#). Why not mention the DREAM Act as an integral component of having a more educated workforce that will contribute to our economy? Or, better yet, mention the tens of thousands of immigrant youth who will not be able to attend college this semester because Congress has failed to pass the DREAM Act.

You made calls to several Republican Senators for comprehensive immigration reform, why not do the same for the DREAM Act? Here in Florida, after months of phone calls, letters, and faxes immigrant youth leaders finally [met with Sen. George Lemieux \(R-FL\)](#) who signaled an openness towards moving forward on the DREAM Act. Why not let him know you're serious about moving the DREAM Act forward this year? Even better, why not call the Democratic Senators who voted against cloture for the DREAM Act in 2007--like Mark Pryor (D-AR), Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Max Baucus (D-MT), Jon Tester (D-MT), Kent Conrad (D-ND), and Byron Dorgan (D-ND)--and ask them to vote in favor of it, this year?

This is the only country we know as our home, Mr. President, and we're not leaving. We are Americans in every sense except for the piece of paper that recognizes us as such. For justice, for human rights, for the economy, for America, please, Mr. President, help us pass the DREAM Act.

Sincerely,  
Gaby Pacheco

## Letter Three

August 11, 2010

Dear Mr. President,

In May, my mother and I were picked up in an immigration raid in our home. I was told that in 2002, when I was just 12, I missed a court date at which I was ordered removed from this

country. I've been in detention for three months, now, awaiting my deportation. My mother was deported on Friday, August 6th, and I'm set to be deported any day now.

I immigrated to the United States from Russia when I was just 11 years old. My mother married a U.S. citizen who is the only father I know. I do not remember much about the journey to America, nor did I even know I was undocumented until I was 15 and asked my parents about getting a driver's permit. This is the only country I know as my home and I don't know what I would do if I were deported, now.

I am a long-time resident of Michigan. I have a fiancée who has been with me for over three years. It would be a great loss to her and to my community if I were deported.

In Russia, it would be difficult for me to survive. I barely speak the language and I have very little family there. I dream of studying film or music. I love my pets and my many friends in the U.S. I want to be able to see them again. Please take action now to stop my deportation.

Sincerely,  
Ivan Nikolov

## Letter Four

September 8, 2010

Dear President Obama,

My name is Chih Tsung Kao. I am 24 years old and am now currently living in Taipei, Taiwan awaiting military service. This is not what I had planned for my life as I entered high school, but it was drastically altered when I found out that I was undocumented at 17.

I arrived in the US on a visitor's visa when I was about 4 years old. My mother had obtained a student visa for me shortly afterwards and moved me to Boulder, Co to live with my grandparents. By the age of 13 my grandparents decided they wanted to retire and move to California. Being raised in Boulder, the only city I've ever known, I decided I wanted to stay and found a friend's parents who would take me in.

I've learned a lot about what it is to be American and to grow up being American from this family. They have been more family to me than my own biological family. I had not lived with my biological parents since I was brought to the US. When I found out about my expired student visa status in high school, I was both ashamed and embarrassed that I couldn't call myself an American. I had felt every bit American as my peers in school, but was not allowed to call myself one due to my lack of papers. My grandparents aren't to blame. They are older and don't know how the system works.

Actually, I'm not too sure a lot of the American citizens know how the system works, how intricate, and how complicated it is to become a citizen and have the freedom that is granted them for just being who they are. My life had two faces then, an American kid doing what kids do, and a depressed individual, feeling alone and unwanted by the country he felt was home. I had never let any of my friends know of my situation until a month before I left for Taiwan.

I graduated from The Colorado School of Mines with a Civil Engineering degree in the spring of '09, and have since decided that I can no longer wait for my life to take a turn for the better by becoming a citizen. I wanted more than anything to be a productive member of society, paying back my debt to society as a working member of the engineering sector. I don't know if I will ever

get a chance to fulfill that now.

Currently, I am living in Taipei, and awaiting mandatory military service for all male Taiwanese citizens. Though I know I must fulfill my duties, I feel that this is yet another year of my life delayed, both personally and professionally. I am currently looking for ways back into the United States, but I fear the ten-year bar for overstaying my "welcome" in the US. Due to this bar, I have also considered immigrating to Canada to start a new life in a country as close to the US as possible. Though it may be too late for me, there are still tens of thousands of students and young adults that can benefit greatly from the passing of the DREAM Act. They, if anything like me, simply wish to be contributing, upstanding citizens of the country they know as "home".

Sincerely,

Chih Tsung Kao