

How a Law is Made

KEY:

ZB: Zoe-Bot
CB: Charlie-Bot
M: Male Speaker
S: Speaker

(MUSIC)
(PLAYGROUND NOISE)
(WHISTLE)

CB: Rules, rules, rules. I can't wait to get my laser cutter qualification and get my rusty backside out into the real world.

(HIGH PITCHED HUMM)

CB: It's always, 'Don't do this. Don't do that,' around here.

ZB: Imagine this place without rules. It would be chaos. The rules are here to make life easier and safer.

(DISTANT SCREAMS)

CB: Huh, well I still can't wait to leave here. I'll just do whatever I feel like.

ZB: Well, think about what things would be like if everybody just did what they felt like. On the outside, there are even more rules, only out there, they're called laws. These laws are here to help you, not hold you back.

(WHOOSH)

They're here to keep you safe, not grind your gears.

(SCREAMING)

(CRYING)

CB: I've never thought of it like that before. Your logic circuits are much sharper than mine, Zoe-Bot.

ZB: Aren't they always, Charlie-Bot? You know, there's a law making factory out there called the Northern Ireland Assembly. It's in Belfast.

CB: A law factory? You're kidding, right? I could see myself working there. I have a few ideas for laws. How about a two day school week?

(HARP)

(MUMBLING)

(SCHOOL BELL RINGS)

(HOORAY!)

ZB: Not so fast, Charlie-Bot. The politicians are the people who make the laws. They are called Members of the Legislative Assembly: MLAs for short. They come from all over Northern Ireland and are chosen by the people who vote for them.

CB: Just like RoboFactor!

(TERRIBLE SINGING)

(BOO!)

CB: So how does this factory work?

ZB: Well, it all begins with ideas. People come up with ideas for new laws. Something that will make the place better or safer, you know, something that will help Northern Ireland run more smoothly.

CB: I suppose that's part of an MLA's job then, to come up with ideas for new laws? So that's what they do!

ZB: Yeah, the ideas begin their life as something called a Bill. It's when the ideas for a new law are written down.

(THUMP)

(GAS)

(CLANK)

ZB: First of all, the rest of the MLAs are told about the Bill in a big meeting.

S: Can I call Mr John McCallister to introduce the Bill?

M: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I beg to introduce the Bill.

CB: And that's it, we have a new law?

ZB: No. It's quite a long journey. The second stage is when the MLAs decide whether or not they think the Bill is a good idea in general. And to decide this, they vote.

S: All those in favour, say 'Aye'.
(AYE)

S: Contrary of any 'Nos'.
(NO)

ZB: If the Bill is going to move onto the next stage, then more MLAs have to vote 'Aye' than 'No'.

CB: And then it's a law?

ZB: No. You have no patience, Charlie-Bot. Now it's time for a small group of MLAs, also known as a committee, to look at the Bill in detail. They'll ask experts for their opinion on the law. So if the Bill was about health, doctors would be asked what they thought.

CB: And so if it was about schools, they'd ask teachers and pupils?

ZB: Precisely.

CB: And now it's a law?

ZB: No. But we're close. The next stage is when all the MLAs vote 'Aye' or 'No' on the ideas the committees come up with. It's called Consideration because they are considering whether the ideas are good or not. They do this twice.
(CHUG)

CB: Do they get to shout 'Aye' and 'No' again?

ZB: Yeah.

CB: I like that bit. And I suppose more have to vote 'Aye' than 'No', if the Bill is going to move on?

ZB: Yes, and after that, it moves onto the final stage.

CB: The final stage! So there's more?

ZB: Well, there's just one more vote to do. The MLAs meet in the Chamber again and decide whether or not to pass the whole Bill.

CB: By voting 'Aye' or 'No'?

ZB: Yeah.

CB: And that's it?

ZB: Well, just about. The MLAs' job is done. Then the most senior lawyer in Northern Ireland checks the Bill and then it's sent to the Queen for her to agree on it. That's called Royal Assent. And that's it. The Bill becomes something called an Act.

CB: And now it's law.

ZB: That's right. What started out simply as an idea to improve our lives becomes a Bill, which gets debated, voted on, investigated and then voted on again and if it makes it through all of that, it becomes a law.

CB: I suppose if it was easy to make laws and just anybody could do it, we'd end up with some stupid laws.

ZB: You've got it. The people making the laws are elected by us and make decisions for us.

CB: I'd better start thinking about who I'm going to vote for.

(MUSIC)