

TITLE:

The Three Branches of the United States Government

CONTRIBUTOR:

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TOPIC:

United States Government

GRADE LEVEL:

7 - 9*

**Can be adjusted for all age groups (young children through adults)*

TIME ALLOTMENT:

20 – 30 minutes

STANDARDS TO BE ADDRESSED:

(Texas) Title 19. Part 2. Chapter 113. Subchapter C. Rule 113.44 Throughout social studies in Kindergarten-Grade 12, students build a foundation in history; geography; economics; government; citizenship; culture; science, technology, and society; and social studies skills. The content, as appropriate for the grade level of course, enables students to understand importance of patriotism, function in a free enterprise society, and appreciate the basic democratic values of our state and nation... (TEC 28,002(h))

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVE AND LESSON OUTCOME:

The learner will:

- Identify the three bodies of the United States Government
- Critically determine and differentiate the roles of each body
- Reference the Roles of each body of government

MATERIALS, RESOURCES, AND TECHNOLOGY TO BE USED BY TEACHER / STUDENT:

- Tree Chart*
- Leaf Cut-Outs*
- Clock or watch with second hand (to be able to see 15 second increments)
- Coin (for a “coin toss” to determine who goes first)

**These items will need to be constructed prior to setting up the activity. Instructions for the construction of these items can be found under the “Procedures” portion of the Lesson Plan.*

INTRODUCTION OF TOPIC:

There are three Branches within the government of the United States: the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judicial.

The Executive Branch (“enforces the law”) consists of the Office of the President, the Office of the Vice President, the Cabinet, and many federal agencies. Within this branch, the President has the power to sign laws into action or veto laws (reject them from being implemented). The Executive Branch carries out and enforces laws. The President can issue executive orders, which direct executive officers or clarify and further existing laws, and can enforce laws through investigations, arrests, and the ability to sue suspects on behalf of the public. The President has the power to extend pardons and clemencies for federal crimes. This branch is also responsible for the military. The President and Vice President are elected by the People (through the Electoral College). The President appoints cabinet members (approved by the Senate) and executive positions. It oversees the Judicial Branch in that it appoints members to the Supreme Court and can give pardons for federal crimes. It oversees the Legislative Branch in that it can sign or veto laws that Congress makes. It is held accountable by the Legislative Branch in that the President can be impeached and removed by the Legislative Branch. It is held accountable by the Judicial Branch in that it can declare acts of the President unconstitutional, which removes those acts and executive orders. It is led by the President of the United States. Presidents hold term of four years with a limit of two elected terms.

The Legislative Branch (“makes the law”) consists of the House of Representatives and Senate. The House of Representatives, often called the “congress” holds 435 representatives who are elected by the people. The number of Representatives is based upon a state’s population (and district areas of a state). Only those within that voting district vote for that Representative. It is led by the Speaker of the House, typically the highest ranking (elected by) official of the majority political party. Representatives hold a term of two years with no limits for re-election.

The Senate holds 100 Senators, consisting of two Senators from each State. Senators hold terms of six years with no limits for re-election. The People of the state elect both senators. The head of the Senate is the Vice President of the United States. (He breaks ties in votes.) Together, the House of Representatives and Senate is called the United States Congress. Congress has the power to declare war and the Senate approves treaties. This branch makes the law. Generally, the House and the Senate work on laws independently (through Committee work) and approve laws independently with votes. Both the House and the Senate must vote to approve a law before it is sent to the President for signing. It is the branch responsible for the printing and coining of money and the U.S. Budget. It is held accountable by the Executive Branch because its laws must be approved (signed into law) or can be vetoed (rejected) by the President. It is held accountable by the Judicial Branch, which can judge a law to be unconstitutional and ended immediately. It holds the Executive Branch accountable in that it must approve the appointees to the Judicial Branch. It holds the Executive Branch accountable in that it can remove a president from office.

The Judicial Branch (“interprets the law”) consists of the Supreme Court and all federal courts. The Supreme Court is composed of nine Justices appointed by the President and is led by the Chief Justice. These Justices serve on a life tenure, which means they serve for life. The justices hear trial cases at the Supreme Court to determine if a law is constitutional. It is held accountable by the Executive Branch in that they are appointed by the President. It is held accountable by the Legislative Branch in that the appointments are approved by the Senate and can be impeached or removed by the Senate. It holds the Legislative Branch in check by evaluating laws and any law it declares unconstitutional is voided. It holds the Executive Branch in check by also having the ability to declare any executive orders unconstitutional.

PROCEDURE FOR INSTRUCTION:

Materials to Make before the Activity:

- Tree Chart – on a large white poster board, draw a thick brown tree trunk (about 5” wide) and three thick branches coming off the trunk. Have smaller branches coming off the three thick branches. Fill in the entire board; but do not add any leaves. Label the three thick branches “Executive”, “Legislative”, and “Judicial”. If you want to repeat this game, laminate the board.
- Leaf Cut-Outs – Cut out 3” x 1” leaf-shaped cut-outs from green construction paper. These will be your leaves. On these leaves write various parts of the different branches. (If you want to repeat this game, laminate the leaf cut-outs.) Attach Velcro to the backs of the leaves and corresponding Velcro to the branches on the tree chart. There should be at least eight spots for Velcro on the tree chart.
 - Executive Branch leaves
 - President
 - In charge of the military
 - Vice President
 - Cabinet
 - Signs or vetoes laws
 - Makes appointments

- Approves laws
 - Makes Orders to clarify laws
- Legislative Branch leaves
 - Congress
 - Senate
 - House of Representatives
 - Declares war
 - Makes laws
 - Can impeach or remove a Justice
 - Prints and coins money
 - Number of representatives determined by state population
- Judicial Branch leaves
 - 9 Justices
 - Interprets law
 - Determines what is constitutional
 - Serves for life
 - Federal courts
 - Supreme Court
 - Chief Justice
 - Can end an Executive Order

Set-up Prior to the Activity:

- Prepare a large spread-out area for the participants. They can be at tables or on the floor but each participant should be able to see the poster board tree

The Activity:

- Divide the participants into 2 or 4 equal teams. It is helpful to not have more than 2-5 players on each team. If you have an unequal number of participants, the extra person can help remove the numbered cards, keep score, or even read the questions (if age appropriate). Two groups will play against each other at a time.
- The first group to play should be seated closely to the posterboard tree cut-out.
- Read the instructions to the participants and make sure they know the rules of the game.
 - Instructions: “We will flip a coin to decide which team goes first. I will read a phrase on a leaf cut-out and ask which branch it corresponds to. Each group will have fifteen seconds to decide what they deem is the correct answer. I will call on one person from a team to give their team’s answer. If the first group answers correctly, they will receive a point. If they do not answer correctly, the other team can steal the question and try to score a point with the correct answer. If neither team guesses correctly, the leaf will be put into the correct branch and no teams receive points. The teams will answer questions back-and-forth until no questions are left. The team with the most points wins.”
- Flip a coin to determine which team goes first
- Follow the directions as stated in the “Instructions.”

After the Activity:

- Clean up the board

LESSON CLOSURE:

Ask the following: “Now that we’ve participated in this game we will do a “fist to five” activity. How confident are you about your knowledge of the duties and branches of the United States Government now that we’ve played the game? Raise one finger if you need some help, two fingers if you are okay, three fingers if you’re pretty good, four fingers if you’re great, and five fingers if you’ve mastered it.

“Do you have any lingering questions about our U.S. Government branches?” (Use the Lesson Plan introduction for assistance.)

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT UNDERSTANDING:

Review the objectives for possible assessment questions. Give a quick quiz to see how many of the objectives were achieved.

- Example: Which branch is responsible for signing or vetoing laws? (Answer: Executive)
- Example: Which branch is led by a Chief Justice? (Answer: Judicial)
- Example: Which branch is responsible for declaring war? (Answer: Legislative)
- Example: Printing coins and money is the responsibility of which branch? (Answer: Legislative)
- Example: The Supreme Court is part of which branch that interprets the law? (Answer: Judicial)
- Example: This group of experts, otherwise known as the Cabinet, is part of which branch? (Answer: Executive)