



Lesson Plan: *Balancing Act*

Context of the unit:

This unit involves a study of the three branches of the United States government.

Context of the lesson within the unit:

This lesson involves students understanding the three branches of the United States government and how these three branches check and balance each other.

Prior to this lesson: Students have been introduced to the historical founding documents of the United States of America, such as the Constitution, Bill of Rights, Declaration of Independence.

Standards Addressed: History Social Science

5.7.4 Understand how the Constitution is designed to secure our liberty by both empowering and limiting central government and **compare the powers granted to citizens, Congress, the president, and the Supreme Court** with those reserved to the states.

Standards Addressed: English/Language Arts

5.1 Connections, Relationships, Applications

Use theatrical skills to dramatize events and concepts from other curricular area, such as reenacting the signing of the Declaration of Independence

Common Core State Standards for ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects K-5

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing K-5



Text Types and Purposes

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading K-5

Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Objective(s):

Students will be able to describe the events that led to the creation of the Constitution.

Students will list and discuss key powers held by the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government.

Students will explain how the system of checks and balances in the Constitution prevents any one branch of the federal government from becoming too powerful.



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Big Idea(s):

This lesson addresses the following big ideas we want learners to begin to understand from Stage One of the unit plan (below):

- The strength of a democracy is equal to the strength of its citizens.
- *E Pluribus Unum*: out of many, one

Essential Questions/Issues:

- What does it mean to be an American citizen?
- How does having written documents help the balance of the three branches of government?
- Is citizenship a right or a responsibility?

Higher Order Thinking Questions:

- How does having three branches of government help the country smoothly and fairly govern? What evidence of that can be shown? (evaluation/analysis)



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Assessment:

Students will show an understanding of the United States government checks and balances through:

- Matching terms
- Sequencing order of the process of passing bills
- Listing powers each branch holds
- Fill in the blank
- True or false
- Interpreting the Preamble of the Constitution
- Writing a letter or persuasive essay

INFORMAL CHECKS

- Students will be evaluated through:
- Checks for understanding
- Teacher observation
- Class participation in small groups and games
- Oral skills in reader's theater

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Note taking organizer provides input of information into lesson (tri-fold)

Quality Criteria:

- Necessary components of persuasive writing: (rubric attached)
- Teacher created formal assessment: (summative) multiple choice, fill-in blank, matching, short answer, (formal scoring provided)



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Graphic Organizer

Tri-fold Graphic Organizer

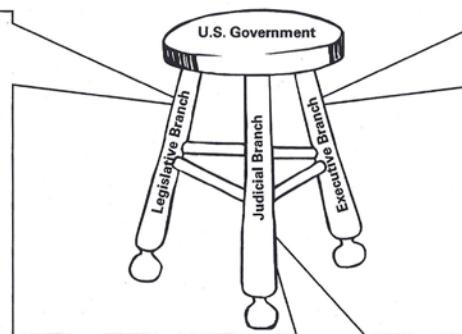
The Constitution created a government as stable/sturdy/strong/durable as a stool with three legs.

14.4 Legislative Branch

Main Responsibility:
making laws

Members:
senators and members of the
House of Representatives

- Key Powers:
- write and pass bills
 - overrule presidential veto with 2/3 majority
 - approve or reject presidential appointments (Senate)
 - approve treaties with 2/3 majority (Senate)
 - declare war
 - impeach government officials (House)
 - collect taxes
 - create national currency



14.5 Executive Branch

Main Responsibility:
carrying out laws

Members:
president and many other
government officials

- Key Powers:
- sign or veto bills passed by Congress
 - make proposals for new laws in State of the Union speeches
 - call Congress together for special sessions
 - sign treaties
 - commander in chief of armed forces
 - nominate judges, ambassadors, and Cabinet members
 - grant pardons
 - represent the United States in foreign affairs

14.6 Judicial Branch

Main Responsibility:
interpreting laws

Members:
Supreme Court justices and federal courts

- Key Powers:
- determine whether laws are unconstitutional
 - determine if treaties are unconstitutional
 - interpret the meaning of laws
 - preside over impeachment trials (chief justice)



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Writing Rubric

Writing Rubric for

<http://www.teach-nology.com/cg/01/writing.asp>

Writing Essays



Name: _____

Teacher: _____

Date Submitted: _____

Title of Work: _____

	Criteria				Points
	1	2	3	4	
Organization	Sequence of information is difficult to follow.	Reader has difficulty following work because student jumps around.	Student presents information in logical sequence which reader can follow.	Information in logical, interesting sequence which reader can follow.	_____
Content Knowledge	Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about subject.	Student is uncomfortable with content and is able to demonstrate basic concepts.	Student is at ease with content, but fails to elaborate.	Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required).	_____
Grammar and Spelling	Work has four or more spelling errors and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has three misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors.	_____
Neatness	Work is Illegible.	Work has three or four areas that are sloppy.	Work has one or two areas that are sloppy.	Work is neatly done.	_____
References	Work displays no references.	Work does not have the appropriate number of required references.	Reference section was completed incorrectly	Work displays the correct number of references, written correctly.	_____
				Total---->	_____

Teacher Comments:

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NAME _____

Our Government Balances Itself ASSESSMENT

Just the Facts

Circle T or F to indicate whether each statement is true or false.

T F 1. The key problem of the Articles of Confederation was that it made the national government too strong.

T F 2. The Constitution created a national government that was divided into three branches: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial.

T F 3. George Washington, Gouverneur Morris, and James Madison were three important people attending the Constitutional Convention.

T F 4. During the Constitutional Convention, there were no disagreements. The delegates all kind of agreed on how the new Constitution should be written.

New Words

Fill in the blanks using key words from the word bank to make the sentence make sense.

Articles of Confederation	branches	checks and balances
Constitution	Constitutional Convention	

5. Delegates from most of the United States met to work on a document that created a strong national government. This meeting was called the _____.

6. The US government is divided into three parts, or _____, each with its own powers and responsibilities.



7. The document that described the first government of the United States of America was called the _____.

8. The system that keeps any one part of the national government from becoming too powerful is called _____.

9. The document that created a strong national government and still exists today is called the _____.

Checks and Balances

Write the letter of the branch of government next to each statement that describes it.

A. executive branch

B. legislative branch

C. judicial branch

_____ 10. This branch has the power to determine whether a law is unconstitutional.

_____ 11. The head of this branch can suggest ideas for new laws in the State of the Union speech.

_____ 12. This branch has the power to impeach government officials accused of serious crimes.

_____ 13. The powers of this branch are appointed by the president and approved by the Senate.

_____ 14. The head of this branch can veto any bill the legislative branch passes.

_____ 15. Members of this branch can accept or reject appointments to important positions that the president makes.



Our Preamble

We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union,**1** establish justice,**2** insure domestic tranquility,**3** provide for the common defense,**4** promote the general welfare,**5** and secure the blessings of liberty**6** to ourselves**7** and our posterity**8**, do ordain**9** and establish**10** this Constitution for the United States of America.

- a. make official
- b. make a better government
- c. supply protection for all
- d. make sure there is peace at home
- e. encourage health, happiness, and comfort
- f. gain and keep the gifts of freedom
- g. set up
- h. everyone who later becomes part of this country
- i. everyone belonging to this country
- j. set up a fair system



Choose one of the writing prompts below and respond.

WRITING PROMPTS

Writing Prompt – Friendly letter to inform

Your class is pen pals with a class from England. They are discussing historical facts about government leadership in other countries and comparing them to their own country. They have asked us to write a summary explaining the role of the office of President, Congress, and Supreme Court in our country and how they work. They will take that information and compare it to their government. Make sure you are clear in your comparison of each branch, and how they interact together.

Writing prompt – Persuasive Essay

A new student has arrived from a South American country. Your class has just finished studying the three branches of the government of the United States. They explained that their country also had a president, but no one else made decisions, and few citizens could or would vote. Their citizens seem to be happy with that. You are to write a persuasive essay to explain the importance of the checks and balances that a three-branch government gives our country and its people. Please include why that system could be beneficial to other countries if they ran their government in a similar manner.



NAME _____

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I F 2. The Constitution created a national government that was divided into three branches: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial.

I F 3. George Washington, Gouverneur Morris, and James Madison were three important people attending the Constitutional Convention.

T F 4. During the Constitutional Convention, there were no disagreements.

The delegates all kind of agreed on how the new Constitution should be written.

New Words

Fill in the blanks using key words from the word bank to make the sentence make sense.

Articles of Confederation

branches

checks and balances

Constitution

Constitutional Convention

5. Delegates from most of the United States met to work on a document that created a strong national government. This meeting was called the Constitutional Convention.



6. The US government is divided into three parts, or branches, each with its own powers and responsibilities.
7. The document that described the first government of the United States of America was called the Articles of Confederation.
8. The system that keeps any one part of the national government from becoming too powerful is called checks and balances.
9. The document that created a strong national government and still exists today is called the Constitution.

Checks and Balances

Write the letter of the branch of government next to each statement that describes it.

A. executive branch B. legislative branch C. judicial branch

C 10. This branch has the power to determine whether a law is unconstitutional.

A 11. The head of this branch can suggest ideas for new laws in the State of the Union speech.

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9 a. make official

1 b. make a better government

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Activity Steps:

Purpose	Teacher	Students
INTO	<p><u>Teacher Instruction Strategies</u></p> <p>Pass out object (ball, dice, cards, etc) to students who are arranged in groups of five. Tell them to play a game (purposefully do not say a name of a game, rules of a game, etc.). Allow students about 7-10 minutes of play.</p> <p>Have students discuss what it was like to play a game without a name or established set of rules. Write down what student share on poster paper.</p> <p>Review with students how as a class you set up class rules using United States Constitution as model. Refer to Class Constitution that was created the first week of school. (Note: posting of Classroom Constitution and the signatures of all students on the document with poster heading <i>below</i>.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Classroom Constitution Rights/Responsibilities/Rules</i></p>	<p><u>Student Activities</u></p> <p>Students dialogue what game they will play, and determine what rules they will need</p> <p>Students will share out frustrations and lessons gleaned from group experience</p> <p>Students will observe original class document</p>



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	<p>Ask students what kinds of things might happen in a classroom without rules, without a leader or consequences. Note any “links” or “tie-in” to the playing of the object game at beginning of lesson.</p> <p>Remind students that all 13 colonies were doing their own thing with money, armies, and government. They needed some conformity.</p> <p>*Three-legged stool story with one leg breaking shows “balance” and keeping one in place...all three legs must be same length and bear the same weight to make things work.</p> <p>Teacher Talk: <i>While milking a cow by hand, the farm lad or dairy maid would sit on a low, sturdy stool, usually constructed with three legs in a tripod arrangement. Even if they were never used for this specific purpose, such three-legged stools are today collectively known as milking stools. The splayed leg arrangement provided stability on the often uneven stone or dry earth floors that were typical of early farm buildings.</i></p>	<p>Students will comment/discuss, share out difficulties they might experience while the teacher writes comments on poster paper.</p> <p>Students respond in class discussion to the inadequacies of weight bearing objects – if unequal.</p>
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	<p>Other options: Use a seesaw with three equal weight items or use a balance scale from science lab or kit</p> <p>Using tri-fold graphic organizer students take notes and use icons during teacher talk (see sample graphic organizer in teacher resource section) provide paper/folding instructions to students...</p> <p><i>Teacher Talk: Label tri-fold with each branch of government as headings: legislative, judicial and executive. List descriptors for each legislative-congress; judicial-supreme court; executive-president. Under each branch label sections as: Main Responsibility; Members; Key Powers (see model).</i></p> <p><i>Read Aloud:</i> <u>Shh! We're Writing the Constitution</u> by Jean Fritz <u>If You Were There When They Signed the Constitution</u> by Elizabeth Levy <u>A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution</u> by Betsy Maestro/Giulio Maestro</p> <p>Introduce vocabulary: checks and balances, Constitution, three branches: legislative, judicial, executive; veto, election, appointment, compromise, rights, due process, Continental Congress, Preamble, Amendments, Declaration of Independence.</p>	<p>Students will follow teacher directions for creating a tri-fold note taking graphic organizer. Make sure all tri-folds are labeled correctly in no particular order</p> <p>Students may be making notes in tri-fold or listening quietly</p> <p>Students will write vocabulary words and definitions on one of the organizer flaps.</p> <p>Students take notes. Students will periodically turn and share with classmate information they just wrote down.</p>
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	<p>Teacher Talk:</p> <p>"We have a system in our United States government that allows us to ensure rights, responsibilities, and freedom for law-abiding citizens. To do this we have three branches of government. This created a more stable form of government following the Revolutionary War."</p> <p>Show the three-legged stool with legs in place</p> <p>Show what happens when one leg does not do what it is supposed to do. Remove one leg, then two. Explain that like a one-legged stool, the central government was weak, ineffective, and very unstable under the Articles of Confederation. The delegates at the Constitutional Convention redesigned the government to create three strong branches (legs) to better meet the needs of a nation that was growing.</p> <p>Information to include in tri-fold:</p> <p>EXECUTIVE: This branch allows the President to <u>execute</u> or carry out the laws established in the Legislative branch of government.</p> <p>LEGISLATIVE: Congress (US) makes the <u>laws</u> that govern. There are 2 representatives from each state in the Senate and 435 members in the House of Representatives.</p>	<p>Students take notes. Students turn to each other and tell each other why our government is compared to a three-legged stool.</p>
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	<p>JUDICIAL: Supreme Court Justices (9) uphold the laws and ensure justice by carrying out the laws established by our national government.</p> <p>Show School House Rock video: <i>Three Ring Circus</i> <i>Or How to Make a Bill</i> Or www.timeforkids.com/branches</p> <p>Determine where students will store tri-fold. Prepare class for group/station activities.</p> <p>Activities/ Centers/Groups:</p> <p>Station 1</p> <p>Power, Power; Who Has the Power Matching</p> <p>Teacher explains directions for activity: Explain that they will play a game that will test their knowledge of the powers held by each branch of government. Tell students to carefully look at each illustration and decide which constitutional power it represents. They should then place the illustration with the matching power card(s). Once the cards are checked, students may sort the cards into three piles by branch of government.</p>	<p>Students continue to take notes Stop them to have them group and share 1 item they just wrote about each branch of government</p> <p>Students continue to take notes during video.</p> <p>Place students in groups (no more than 5 groups).</p> <p>Students play the game. The cards will show nine situations. Each one requires action by one or two or three of the branches of the federal government. In the first 4 situations only one card may be played. In the remaining cards two or more may be played. If students want to they can put the cards in order of action taken by the three branches.</p>
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	<p>Station 2</p> <p>Our Government Concentration</p> <p>Teacher explains directions for activity: Students have three choices as to how this game is played. They must decide if they want to lay all the cards face up and place them on the chart in the matching or corresponding box. Or they may turn all the cards for both sets face up and match the two cards that go together. Or they may turn all cards face down in two separate groupings and match the corresponding pairs by turning them over two at a time.</p> <p>Station 3</p> <p>Constitutional Preamble Group Write <i>(Write the preamble in the center of a sheet of chart paper)</i></p> <p>Teacher explains directions for this activity: Students will create 6 symbols to represent each of the six parts of the Preamble. In their own words, they will write a sentence that tells what each symbol means. Remind them this will be shared with the class and to plan their poster carefully and neatly. Place the student book <u>We The Kids</u> by David Catrow at the center to guide student brainstorming.</p>	<p>Students will decide if they want to lay all the cards face up and place them on the chart in the matching or corresponding box. They may also decide as a group to turn all the cards for both sets face up and match the two cards that go together. Or they may play the game by turning all cards face down in two separate groupings and match the corresponding pairs by turning them over two at a time.</p> <p>Large paper needed with prewritten preamble on paper for each group (5 total).</p> <p>Students will create 6 symbols to represent each of the six parts of the Preamble. In their own words, they will write a sentence that tells what each symbol means.</p>
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	<p>Station 4</p> <p>Three Branch Hula Hoop Game</p> <p>Teacher explains directions for activity: There will be 3 hula hoops on the floor each representing a branch of our government. Each Branch will have a label. Students are to place a label (a branch of government) in each hoop. Then they decide as a team which cards correctly identify the branch of government that handles what the card states. Extension could include students lining up cards with how each branch checks each other.</p> <p>Station 5</p> <p>Comparison Quick Write</p> <p>Teacher explains directions for playing activity: Tell students they should reflect and discuss how this lesson started. Remind them about the game without rules, the class without rules, and what we learned about states without rules. They should brainstorm together on the sheet all the ideas they can think of for five minutes. When the timer goes off they should begin writing their individual quick write responding to the prompt. Give them about 10 minutes.</p>	<p>Students will place a label of each branch in a different hula hoop. Students are to decide as a team which cards correctly identify the branch of government that handles what the card states. They will place the cards in the correct hula hoop.</p> <p>Need chart paper (1 per group=5 total) with the prompt: <i>Our class is made up of about _____ individuals. Suppose each of us followed only our own rules, our own ideas about learning, and our own way of doing things. Would our class be a pleasant place to be? Would the class be strong or weak?</i> <i>Explain in a brief quick write how that experience is similar to the experience of our founding fathers, and what they chose to do about it.</i></p>
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	<p>Lesson Closure</p> <p>Culminating Activity/or GATE – Reader's Theatre</p> <p><u>Unite or Die How Thirteen States Became a Nation</u> by Charlesbridge Locate at: http://www.charlesbridge.com/client/client_pdfs/downloadables/UniteorDie_ReaderTheater.pdf</p> <p>Give assessments:</p> <p>Multiple Choice and Match Test</p> <p>On Demand Prompts – either assessment choice.</p>	See Teacher Resource section See Teacher Resource section
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Special Needs of students are considered in this lesson:

The activities in this lesson such as Power, Power; Concentration; Rewriting the Preamble, Hula Hoop branches and a quick write all provide the opportunity for strategic groups of students and meeting all student learning styles. For example, the hula hoop activity allows for kinesthetic learners and the grouping for the writing activities allows for partnering students with who may need assistance in this area. The Readers' Theater activity provides another avenue for extending student learning and providing students the opportunity to participate in a visual/performing arts activity.

Extension Ideas:

- GATE and/or high achieving students may write their own classroom or family Bill of Rights.
- Utilize resources provided by Time for Kids online and the weekly magazine (Sept. 18, 2009) issue covers the Supreme Court and the three branches of government.



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Materials and Resources Needed:

- Writing prompt and rubric for each student
- Paper for tri-fold
- Hula Hoops (three x 5 groups = 15) for demonstration
- Three - leg stool
- Chart paper
- White board pens
- Game materials (prepared in advance of lesson)

References:

- Ben's Guide to US Government: <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/governnet/branches.html>
- (i.e.: H/SS Framework, websites referenced, books)
- <http://www.ca.gov/HomeFamily/JustForKids.html>
- [www2.courtino.ca.gov/lre2/CourtsLRE/index.html](http://www2.courtinfo.ca.gov/lre2/CourtsLRE/index.html)
- Ten Things to Teach About Congress
www.congresslink.org/print_exper_polisciteach.htm
- State of California Just for Kids (see Home & Family section)
- Seesaw Analogy
www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/teacher_lessons/3branches/6.htm
- History Alive! America's Past: Teacher's Curriculum Institute, www.historyalive.com
- Early United States: Harcourt Brace, <http://www.hbschool.com>
- We the People The Citizen and the Constitution Level One: Center for Civic Education, www.civiced.org



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- www.timeforkids.com/branches
- http://www.charlesbridge.com/client/client_pdfs/downloadables/UniteorDie_ReadersTheater.pdf

Teacher Resources:

Use Ben's Guide for US Government for kids Branches of Government

- SEPARATION OF POWERS. The system of dividing the powers and duties of a government into different branches. The framers of the Constitution needed to provide for a separation of powers,
- THREE SEPARATE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT. Each has its own responsibilities and at the same time they work together to make the country run smoothly and to assure that the rights of citizens are not ignored or disallowed.
- This is done through CHECKS AND BALANCES (limits imposed on all branches of government by giving each the right to amend acts of the other branches....a branch may use its powers to check the powers of the other two in order to maintain a balance of power among the three branches of government.



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Student Handouts:

WRITING PROMPTS

Writing Prompt – Friendly letter to inform

Your class is pen pals with a class from England. They are discussing historical facts about government leadership in other countries and comparing them to their own country. They have asked us to write a summary explaining the role of the office of President, Congress, and Supreme Court in our country and how they work. They will take that information and compare it to their government. Make sure you are clear in your comparison of each branch, and how they interact together.

Writing prompt – Persuasive Essay

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