

## THE THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT

### LESSON PLAN

#### Objectives

- Students will be able to identify the three branches of the US federal government.
- Students will be able to describe the function or purpose of each branch.
- Students will be able to identify the major participants in each branch of government.
- Students will be able to give a basic explanation of the “checks and balances” concept.

#### Materials

VIDEO: [The Three Branches of Government](#)

ARTICLE: [The Three Branches of the US Government](#)

HANDOUT: [Three Branches of Government cloze chart](#)

HANDOUT: [“Three branches of one government tree” cut and paste sheet](#)

Other:

- Flashcards with written keywords
- Hula Hoops x3 (or 3 boxes/containers)
- pens/pencils
- scissors
- glue

#### Suggested Procedure

1. Warm-Up: Play [“The Three Branches of Government”](#) video.
2. Read the article [“The Three Branches of the US Government”](#) as a class. Alternatively, you can divide the students into groups, assigning each group a branch of the government to read about. They could then report to the rest of the class on their section of the article, coming back together to read the “checks and balances” section at the end.
3. Ask comprehension questions about the text. Some suggested questions:
  - How many branches of government does the US have?
  - Which branch does Congress belong to?
  - Congress is made up of two chambers – what are they called?
  - What job does the legislative branch have?

- What is legislation?
  - What does the executive branch do?
  - Who is in charge of the executive branch?
  - Who writes laws?
  - Who has to approve legislation before it becomes a law?
  - Who makes up the judicial branch?
  - What is the highest court in the land?
  - Why does the American government have checks and balances?
  - Can you describe a check on one of the branches' power?
  - Why does the US have three branches of government?
4. Give students the [cloze chart handout](#). Have them fill in the blanks using the terms from the word bank.
  5. Tell the students it's time to play some games. Make up three different body actions, each representing a branch of government (eg. executive branch = stand on one leg, legislative branch = stretch to the sky, judicial branch = crouch on the floor). Call out a keyword for one of the branches of government, and have students perform the corresponding action.

Suggested keywords and phrases: Congress, president, debating laws, writing laws, reviewing laws, judges, courts, Senate, House of Representatives, White House, approving laws, veto, legislation, Supreme Court, enforcing laws, judicial, executive, legislative, federal agencies/departments.

6. Arrange three hula hoops (or circles of string, boxes, etc.) on the floor. Hold up a large flashcard with a keyword on it (eg. "Senate"). Select a student volunteer to read the flashcard and place it in the correct hoop. Repeat with different keywords.
7. Divide the class into three groups – one is the executive, one is the legislative, one is the judiciary. Read out a keyword for one of the branches of government (eg. "president" or "writing laws"). Students listen to the keyword, and the correct group has to stand up and wave their hands in the air (or another assigned action).
8. Roleplaying activity: Bring three students up to the front. Assign one of them the role of the legislative (Student 1), one the executive (Student 2) and one the judicial (Student 3). Student 1 has twenty seconds to "write a law" in the form of suggesting a new classroom rule. The class can vote on whether they want to pass the rule or not. If the class passes it, the rule goes to Student 2, who either approves or vetoes it. If approved, the teacher asks if any member of the class disputes the rule – if so, they have 30 seconds to present their case to Student 3, the judiciary. Student 3 either upholds the rule or strikes it down. Adjust the activity based on the needs of the students – it can be fast-paced or slowed down as necessary. Repeat with a different set of students playing the roles.
9. Give students the ["Three branches of one tree" handout](#). They cut and paste the words, sorting them onto the correct tree branch. Early finishers can also color and decorate their tree.

**Extension 1**

*Overview:* Students create a poster depicting a flow chart of the federal government and its three branches.

**Extension 2**

*Research Project:* Students research one chosen branch of the government and make a detailed poster about it.

**Extension 3**

*Class collage:* Students work together to create a large “tree” collage on a roll of butcher’s paper or some poster sheets using brown and green construction paper. One “branch” of the “tree” is the legislative, one is the executive, and one is the judiciary. Once the tree trunk is complete, students decorate their own “leaf,” writing a key piece of information about their chosen or assigned branch. Early finishers can create multiple leaves. Finally, the students paste their leaves onto the appropriate branch, revealing the completed tree.