

## Teacher's Guide: The Powers of Government

Recommended Grade Level: 5-8

(also applicable to grades 9-12 for students requiring significant support in learning)

Suggested Time: About 50-60 minutes spread over one or more class periods, plus additional time to complete a writing assignment

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### Goals

Following are the big ideas that students should take away after completing this lesson:

- The U.S. Constitution divides the U.S. government into three branches with different roles
- The three branches were created to prevent any one person or group from controlling the government
- The three branches of the U.S. government are connected and have shared responsibilities

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### Vocabulary

(See definitions on page 6.)

- commerce
- representatives
- responsibilities
- separation

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### Key Literacy Strategies

Following are the primary literacy strategies students will use to complete this activity:

- Making inferences (screen 4, essay topic 3)
- Determining important information (screens 6, 7, and 8, writing assignment 2)
- Categorizing basic facts and ideas (screen 10)
- Constructing summaries (writing assignment 1)

Note: In addition to using the key literacy strategies listed above, students will use each of the strategies below to complete this lesson:

- Monitoring comprehension
- Synthesizing
- Making predictions
- Developing vocabulary
- Connecting prior knowledge to new learning
- Developing a topic in writing
- Identifying and using text features (photographs, captions, diagrams, and/or maps)

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### Overview

*The Powers of Government* is a student-directed learning experience. However, while students are expected to work through the lesson on their own, teachers should be available to keep the lesson on track, organize groupings, facilitate discussions, answer questions, and ensure that students meet all learning goals.

The following is a summary of the lesson screens:

- Screen 1: Students learn that the U.S. federal government carries out many jobs and has many powers. They are asked to consider how we know that the government will use these powers fairly.
- Screen 2: Students read that Americans fought for freedom from Britain so that they could create a new government in which they would have a say. They wanted a government that would not give any one person or group too much control.
- Screen 3: Students learn what the goals are for the lesson, which strategies they will be using to complete the lesson, and the important vocabulary words they will use during the lesson.
- Screen 4: Students read about the main responsibilities of the three branches of the U.S. government. They then list two to three reasons why they think it's important to divide responsibilities among these branches.
- Screen 5: Students read and watch a video about why John Adams believed that the Massachusetts constitution should divide power among three separate branches of government.
- Screen 6: Students answer three multiple-choice questions to show their comprehension of John Adams's plan for dividing power in government.
- Screen 7: Students read about three examples of how the U.S. Constitution uses a system of "checks and balances" to maintain a balance of power in the federal government. They then write two to three sentences to explain what they think the phrase "checks and balances" means.
- Screen 8: Students read a passage to learn more about the balance of power among the three branches of the U.S. government. They then write down one job of each branch of the federal government and describe how this work is checked by another branch.
- Screen 9: Students complete an interactive vocabulary activity, and then choose two words from the vocabulary list and write a new sentence for each word. These tasks demonstrate their understanding of the meanings of the words.
- Screen 10: Students use an interactive activity to categorize the jobs performed by the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the U.S. government.

Final

Assignment: Students select and complete a writing assignment about the lesson topic.

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**Before the Lesson**

- Go through each screen of the lesson, including all the interactive activities, so that you can experience ahead of time what students will be doing. As you go through each screen, jot down your own expectations for students' responses.

- ❑ Determine if students will be working individually or in pairs on the lesson. Some students may be able to work independently with little or no support. Students who are less familiar with the subject area or who struggle with literacy skills may benefit from working with another student. An effective way to do this is to pair a stronger student with a less able reader. You can also have students work individually on certain tasks and in pairs on others, depending on their experience and needs. If students will be working in pairs on any portion of the lesson, let them know if they will be expected to type in their notes individually or together.
- ❑ Provide instruction on key vocabulary (vocabulary words are defined in the lesson on screen 3, and on page 6 of this guide).
- ❑ Determine what students already know about the roles of the three branches of the U.S. government, including the system of checks and balances that maintains a balance of power. You may want to use specific questions to start the discussion, such as: What are the three branches of the US government? If students do not know, list them on the board and ask, “What is the role of each branch?” Why do you think we have three separate branches of government? Who writes the laws in the U.S.? What kinds of things does the president do? What does the Supreme Court do? Record their ideas on a chart. This will give you a sense of the background knowledge and possible misconceptions that students have before beginning this lesson. If time allows, return to the chart after students have completed the lesson to add new learning and correct misconceptions. Note: You may want to record their new learning in a different-colored ink so they can see how much they’ve learned.
- ❑ Arrange computers with Internet access so students can work individually or in pairs.
- ❑ Before students begin, suggest a timeline for completing the lesson, mention the different types of media they will encounter, and let them know how you expect them to submit their work. You may want to provide an outline of this information on a chart, chalkboard, or whiteboard, or as a handout.

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## Lesson Assessments

The following are descriptions of the lesson features that will be part of the packet of materials that students will submit. Students will use the packet for reference when writing their final assignment. It also serves as a formative assessment tool to monitor students’ work as they’re progressing through the lesson.

- **Notes** - Students take notes on screens 4, 7, and 8. If time allows, review their notes before students begin their writing assignment.
- **Multiple-choice questions** - Students complete three questions on screen 6. Walk around to make sure students answer all three questions in the quiz before they move on. If students click to go to the next page before they finish, their work on the quiz will not be saved.
- **Match It!** - Students complete an interactive vocabulary activity on screen 9. They begin by placing the vocabulary terms into the correct sentences. After they finish and save their work, they will be able to check their answers against an answer key. When they

are done, they will be asked to choose two vocabulary words and write a new sentence for each word. Sentences should demonstrate a clear understanding of the meaning of each word. An inappropriate response would be “People have many responsibilities.” An appropriate response would be “Each branch of the U.S. government has different responsibilities.”

- **Arrange It!** - Students complete the concept map activity Arrange It! on screen 10. Students determine whether given governmental responsibilities are carried out by the executive, legislative, or judicial branch. Students will not be able to check their answers online, so you will need to provide them with correct answers when they are finished with the lesson. You can choose to review the answers as a class or return the corrected packet of materials to students before they begin the final assignment.

Following are the responsibilities that students will drag and drop onto the concept map in the appropriate category:

#### **Executive**

- Suggests plan for federal budget
- Enforces laws
- Can veto a bill
- Is commander in chief of the armed forces
- Makes treaties with other nations

#### **Legislative**

- Controls federal taxes and spending
- Writes, debates, and passes bills into law
- Can declare war on other countries
- Can impeach an official
- Oversees interstate and foreign commerce
- Approves budget

#### **Judicial**

- Can declare executive actions unconstitutional
  - Decides arguments about the meaning of laws
  - Decides if a law or government action violates the Constitution
  - Makes the decision in disagreements among branches of the federal government
- **Final Assignment** - Students complete one final writing assignment. You can choose to let students make their own selection, or assign one according to your goals for the lesson. Use the rubric on page 7 to assess the writing assignments.

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## Lesson Aids and Extensions

Use the following suggestions to help students if they are stuck on a particular screen, to prepare students for completing their writing assignments, or as follow-up discussions to reinforce learning.

- **Watching Videos** - Encourage students to watch the video more than once. After the initial viewing, provide students with a specific content focus to frame their next viewing(s) of the video. This will help them draw connections between the main topic and the information that the video has to offer.
- **Participating in Discussions** - Organize class discussions or encourage students to talk about their questions in pairs. You may want to use the following discussion starters.
  - o What are the reasons for dividing power among different branches of the U.S. government?
  - o What might be the benefits and challenges of dividing responsibilities among the three branches?
  - o How does the system of checks and balances work?
- **Reading the PDF Text** - Before students read the PDF text on screen 8, ask them to review their notes on the responsibilities of each branch of the U.S. government and consider why it is important for the branches to share this power.
- **Sharing Student Work** - It may be motivational, and a further learning opportunity, for students to post their final essays so that their classmates, peers, and/or parents can see them. This may also provide an opportunity for students to comment on and discuss each other's essays.

If you do not already have access to an online writing community, Teaching Matters™ provides TeXT, free classroom publishing tools that allow teachers and students to create and publish their own online eZine. More information and a free signup are available at Teaching Matters: TeXT (<http://text.teachingmatters.org>).

- **Reflection and Self-Assessment** - After students have turned in their writing assignments, you can choose to have them assess their learning. Bring students together as a whole class or in small groups to discuss the questions below. You may want to return to the chart of their ideas developed before the lesson and record their new learning. You may also have students respond individually to the questions and then convene the class to discuss the chart.
  - o What did you learn?
  - o What was surprising?
  - o What questions do you still have?
  - o What was the easiest for you to understand and do?
  - o What was the most difficult?

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## **Vocabulary Definitions**

### **commerce**

The exchange (trade) of goods and services.

### **representatives**

People who represent, or speak for, others and their interests. The people elected to Congress are representatives for the people in their state or region.

### **responsibilities**

The tasks that someone is expected to do or is accountable for.

### **separation**

When two or more things are divided, or taken apart, from one another.

## Final Assignment Rubric The Powers of Government

1. List the three branches of the U.S. government. Describe the responsibilities of each branch, and give one example of what each branch does.
2. Make a list of some of the main jobs of the U.S. government. Select two jobs from your list and explain for each one: (1) whose responsibility it is to do the job, and (2) who provides the checks and balances.
3. Explain why you think checks and balances are an important part of how the U.S. government works. Give an example of where you think this shared power is important.

4	3	2	1
Provides a clear and accurate response to the question. Ideas are elaborated, with three or more relevant supporting details from the reading passage, video, and other materials in the lesson.	Provides an adequate response to the question. Topic and ideas are generally well organized, with two relevant supporting details from the reading passage, video, and other materials in the lesson.	Provides a generally accurate response, with one supporting detail from the reading passage, video, and other materials in the lesson.	Provides an inaccurate response to the question or fails to address the question. May include misinterpretations. Understanding of the topic is not apparent.
Uses at least three vocabulary words (or a form of the vocabulary words) from the lesson, and uses them all correctly.	Uses two vocabulary words (or a form of the vocabulary words) from the lesson, and uses them both correctly.	Uses one vocabulary word (or a form of the vocabulary word) from the lesson, and uses it correctly.	Does not use any vocabulary words, or uses vocabulary words incorrectly.

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## Scoring the Rubric

Here are two suggestions for scoring the final assignment rubric. Select the option that best meets your needs or develop your own grading system.

**Option 1:** This option provides one score for each submitted assignment.

Assign a score of 4 or below for the written response (first row of the rubric) and a score of 4 or below for the use of vocabulary (second row of the rubric), for a total maximum score of 8. The interpretation of scores is as follows:

Score	Grade	Narrative Interpretation
7-8	A	Excellent
5-6	B	Good
4	C	Adequate (Fair)
3 or below	D	Minimal

**Option 2:** This option provides two scores for each submitted assignment: one for written content and one for the use of key vocabulary. An advantage of separate scores is that you can weight students' comprehension and composition differently than you do their knowledge of vocabulary. It can also help you identify specific needs for future instruction.

Assign a score of 4 or below for the written response (first row of the rubric) and a score of 4 or below for the use of vocabulary (second row of the rubric) and then score them separately. The interpretation of scores is as follows:

Score	Grade	Narrative Interpretation
4	A	Excellent
3	B	Good
2	C	Adequate (Fair)
1	D	Minimal

The final grade may look like this: A/B (A for content and B for vocabulary use).