The Three Branches of Government

Internet Lesson Plan
Grade level: 6-8

Teacher Activities

Goal:
To utilize Internet in researching information relating to the three branches of government, the power and responsibility each branch holds.

Objective:
At the end of the unit, the participant will be able to:

- Describe the importance of each of the three branches of government.
- Outline the historical documents which led to the development of our democratic form of government.
- Identify the roles and responsibilities of each branch of the Federal Government.
- Compare and contrast the three branches of government.
- List four different types of agencies found in the Federal Government and describe their role.
- Explain the differences between a bill, joint resolution, concurrent resolution, and simple resolution.
- Author an e-mail or letter to an executive in the Federal Government using proper English, spelling, and Internet etiquette.
- Locate important citizen related information through queries on the Internet.
- List the names and responsibilities of the leaders in his/her state government.

Duration:
Three weeks, with one hour of online time each day.
**Instructional Strategy:**

Divide the class into pairs or small groups of approximately 2-3 participants each. Provide each group with a two-pocket folder. Distribute the activities in the left pocket of each folder to encourage problem-solving strategies within the group.

Have students utilize the right hand pocket of the folder to record their strategies, take notes, and track project completion.

Be sure to provide additional library resources for students to use as they begin to complete the activities, encouraging both online and off-line research.

**Prerequisite:**

A short introduction to the Internet with information on access and addresses is required before participants go online. Ensure that students are familiar with the World Wide Web and Gopher.

**Assessment/Evaluation:**

This activity is evaluated on the basis of student performance. Team folders will include information gathered in the process of completing the activities. This teaching methodology encourages cooperative learning, group process, problem-solving, competition, and the use of the Internet. In addition, the teacher is free to serve as facilitator and guide rather than presenter at the front of the classroom.

Encourage sharing through oral presentations by group members upon completion of the activities. This provides participants with an opportunity to organize, rehearse, and participate in public speaking while encouraging large-group cooperative learning.

**Other Related Activities:**

- Take a trip to the State Capital and see how the state government is run. Visit state historical sites and learn about the people who made political contributions to their state.
- Create a Who's Who of statesmen and stateswomen—which outlines the history of your state, including the leaders who have made major contributions to the state's growth and development.
- Invite a Senator or Representative to come to your school and present to the student body on career day. Ask the speaker to encourage students to become not only politically aware, but politically active.
• Create a Day in the Life of... album or book which outlines a government official's daily activities. This could be done on the President, Vice President, First Lady, State Senator, Speaker of the House, etc. Clip newspaper articles, magazine photographs, and information from the Internet to complete the book.

• Ask students to locate newspaper or magazine articles on legislative issues in the news. Create a "What's Hot" bulletin board where students can place their contributions.

• Create a mock government in your classroom where each student plays a role in the government. Ask students to perform duties similar to those of the public servants they are portraying.

Materials Needed by Teacher:

• Two-pocket folders

Teacher Notes:

You may find it necessary and important to refer students to textbooks and supplemental online and off-line materials relating to the three branches of government. Although there is an abundance of information found on this topic on the Internet, it may be necessary to simplify and clarify the role of each of the three branches of government and how they were created to place "checks and balances" between the organizations.

Provide additional classroom resources which will encourage independent vocabulary building and problem-solving skills as the activities are completed.
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Student Activities

ACTIVITY #1: WHERE IN THE WORLD IS OUR HISTORY?

Three significant historical documents that will help you learn more about our government and its founding are the Declaration of Independence, The Constitution and The Bill of Rights. But just where are these documents?

Let's try Washington, D.C. Take a quick "virtual" trip there to check out the Rotunda Room at the National Archives. Go to the "Washington D.C. Sightseeing Map" at http://sc94.ameslab.gov/TOUR/tour.html.

1. Locate and select the National Archive on the map.
2. When was the National Archive founded?
3. To what part of the government does this agency belong?
4. Does this agency perform any other duties? List these duties.

ACTIVITY #2: THE MAKING OF A NATION

Visit "The Exhibit Hall of the National Archives and Records Administration" at http://www.nara.gov/exhall/exhibits.html. What is the purpose of The National Archives and Records Administration?

Select "The Charters of Freedom". As you explore this exhibit, locate information which will help you answer the following questions about the Declaration of Independence, The Constitution, and The Bill of Rights.

1. Declaration of Independence (Hint: You may need to explore the "transcription" section.)
   - When was this document drafted? and by whom?
   - What was happening in Britain and the new Colonies that led to the creation of this document?
   - List five grievances directed at the king.

2. The Constitution (Hint: You may need to explore "A More Perfect Union" and "Questions and Answers Pertaining to the Constitution")
✓ When was this document drafted? and by whom?
✓ How and why was this document created?
✓ Who was elected the President of the Constitutional Convention?
✓ When did the phrase "United States of America" originate?
✓ Who was called the "Father of the Constitution"?

3. The Bill of Rights
✓ What prompted the creation of the Bill of Rights?
✓ When was this document drafted? and by whom?
✓ How many amendments are included in the Bill of Rights?
✓ To whom did the "voice of dissent" belong? and why?

ACTIVITY #3: THE THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT


How is each branch of the government outlined in this document? Read over the document (or print a copy) and locate the answers to the following questions regarding the three branches of government:

1. The Legislative Branch
   ✓ Where does all the Legislative power lie?
   ✓ Who makes up the House of Representatives?
   ✓ What are the prerequisites to becoming a member of the House of Representatives?
   ✓ Who makes up the Senate?
   ✓ What are the prerequisites to becoming a member of the Senate?
   ✓ Outline the powers of each of these legislative bodies.
   ✓ Where does the Vice President fit in this picture?

2. The Executive Branch
   ✓ Who holds the power in the Executive Branch?
   ✓ What are the prerequisites to be a presidential candidate?
   ✓ What does an elected president have to do before taking office?
   ✓ Outline the powers of the president.
   ✓ List causes for removal from positions within the Executive Branch.

3. The Judicial Branch
   ✓ Where does the Judicial power lie?
   ✓ Outline the powers of the Judicial officers.
ACTIVITY #4: EXECUTIVE RESEARCHER

You've been appointed an executive researcher. Your assignment is to explore the Executive Branch in more detail. Visit the following Web pages to learn more about this branch of the government:

- "United States Information Agency" - [http://www.usia.gov/usa/usa.htm](http://www.usia.gov/usa/usa.htm)  
  Explore "The Executive Branch"

1. Write a brief description of each office and agency.
2. How many independent government agencies are there?
3. How many Executive Branch agencies are there?
4. Create a chart for each of the offices and agencies of the Executive Branch. The chart should include the following categories:
   - Name
   - Date when created
   - Duties
   - Internal or foreign policy based

ACTIVITY #5: DEAR MR. PRESIDENT

Return to the "White House" Web page at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/). Select "The President & Vice President."

Send an E-mail or a letter via the U.S. mail to one of the following:

- The President
- The Vice President
- The First Lady

Your correspondence could be stating your opinion about a current event, asking for their opinion or stance on a current issue, or asking a question about their job responsibilities.

Proofread carefully! Your letter or e-mail will be the first and maybe only impression this very influential person will have of you, so make it good!

Use "Webster’s Hypertext Interface" Web page at [http://gs213.sp.cs.cmu.edu/prog/webster](http://gs213.sp.cs.cmu.edu/prog/webster) for questions on spelling.
Be sure to use proper Internet etiquette as you complete your correspondence. Review e-mail etiquette at the "Etiquette for Public E-Mail Systems" Web page at http://www.netpath.net/~gwicker/email.htm.

**ACTIVITY #6: LEGISLATIVE LEGS**

Let's do some legislative leg work and explore the Legislative Branch in more detail by exploring "The Legislative Branch" page at http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/html/legi.html.

1. Create a chart of the organizations that make up the Legislative Branch. Include the following information in your chart:
   - Name
   - Date when created
   - Duties
   - Internal or foreign policy based

2. Explore the House of Representatives to locate the following information at "US House of Representatives - Home Page" at http://www.house.gov/ to locate the following information:
   - What Congress and Session is currently taking place?
   - What is the chief function of Congress?
   - List the members of the house from your state, including their district, and political affiliation.
   - Do they have an e-mail address? If so, what?
   - Send one of them an e-mail on a current event of concern to you.
   - List the current weekly House Floor Schedule.

   - List the senators from your state. What is their political affiliation?
   - Do any of your senators have e-mail? If so, send one of them an e-mail on a current event of concern to you.

4. Create a chart of the leadership of the U.S. Senate. Include the following information:
   - Name
   - Position
   - Home state
   - Committee assignments
ACTIVITY #7: FOR THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD...


The United States Senate can be explored in more detail at "The United States Senate" Web page at http://policy.net/capweb/Senate/Senate.html.

1. How are the members of the Senate classified? Describe each classification.
2. Locate the names, political affiliation, term ending date, and committees of which each of your Senators is a member.
3. How many Democrats are currently in the United States Senate?
4. How many Republicans are currently in the United States Senate?
5. Who currently holds the following leadership positions:
   - Leadership - Republican and Democratic parties
   - Minority/Majority Leader
   - Republican/Democratic Whip

Additional information on the House of Representatives can be found at "The United States House of Representatives" Web page at http://policy.net/capweb/House/House.html.

1. How many Democrats are currently in the House of Representatives?
2. How many Republicans are currently in the House of Representatives?
3. Who are the House Democratic Leaders?
4. What are the responsibilities of the "Whip?"

ACTIVITY #8: THE MAKING OF A LAW

Let's take a closer look at the biggest job responsibility of members of Congress. To learn more about laws and their creation, visit the House of Representatives "Legislative Process" Web page at http://www.house.gov/Legproc.html. Explore the "Tying it all Together" section.

1. Describe the difference between:
   - Bills
   - Joint Resolutions
   - Concurrent Resolutions
   - Simple Resolutions
2. Go to "How Our Laws are Made" and create a flow chart on how laws are created. Outline the major steps involved in the process of making a law.
ACTIVITY #9: ORDER IN THE COURT!

The last branch of government to explore in more detail is the Judicial Branch. Explore the following Web sites to learn more about this critical division of the Federal Government:


1. Briefly describe the role and responsibility held by the Judicial Branch of the Federal Government.
2. Is the Judicial Branch of government equal in power to the Executive Branch?
3. Create a chart outlining the levels of the courts which constitute the Judicial Branch.
4. How does a civil case get heard by the Supreme Court?
5. How does a criminal case get heard by the Supreme Court?
6. Compare and contrast the two types of cases.
7. How many judges make up the Supreme Court? List them.

ACTIVITY #10: THE WHOLE GOVERNMENT IN YOUR HANDS!

As you have seen, our government is a massive group of people, agencies and organizations which were established to serve, provide and protect us as citizens of the United States. Sometimes it can be difficult to locate information in this bureaucracy. Visit the "White House" Web page at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/)

Select "Interactive Citizens' Handbook - Your Guide to the U.S. Government." Select "Search the White House database" and "Search all government websites" Locate citizen information on the following issues:

- You need to apply for a copyright or patent. How?
- You need to find out about getting a passport to travel to Ireland.
- Where do you go? What paperwork is required?
- Who is the ambassador of Ireland, and where is the embassy located?
- You need a social security card. How do you get one?

ACTIVITY #11: WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Now that you've become familiar with the Federal Government, let's take a look at your state government. How familiar are you with the legislature in your own back yard? State government information can be found at "The Home Pages of..."
the United States” at

1. Select your home state.
2. Who is the Governor of your state?
3. Who is the Lieutenant Governor of your state?
4. How many state senators are there?
5. How many representatives are there?
6. Locate two interesting facts about your state government that you did not
know prior to completing this activity. These two facts can be agencies
you did not know existed, State capital information, fun facts or tidbits
about your state, or judicial facts and figures.