
STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT

10-20 Days

GRASPING THE WAY THINGS WORK

OVERVIEW

Knowledge of the structure of government is clearly of the utmost importance to students' completion of their *PARTICIPATION* project. The curriculum is not, however, designed to teach students specifically *about* the structure of the government, but rather, *how to use it*. Thus, this section is intended both to refresh and expand students' previous understanding of U.S. national and local political systems and to introduce an understanding of government as an interactive process. The unit can be expanded or contracted based on need.

While instructional approaches are suggested in this unit, we recognize that teachers have taught this material and have engaging and interactive strategies for addressing this content that they may prefer to use. We would simply urge teachers to design all lessons within the "Structure of Government" unit to increase students' ability to interact with government. Thus, the goal is not to teach "how a bill becomes a law," but rather, "how you can affect lawmaking and your society." Students, ideally, should understand how, when, and why they should address different areas of the government when they want to make a change.

In addition, while comparing and contrasting the powers and processes of local, state, and federal governments is essential, it is also beneficial to compare the democratic republic of the United States with generic despotic, oligarchic, parliamentary, and true democratic forms of government to impart a better understanding of the differences to the students.

We recommend that, directly before this unit, students be given the task of recording their activities for a twenty-four hour period (use the 24-Hour Study handout).

COLORADO CIVICS STANDARDS ADDRESSED: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 2.2., 2.3, 2.4, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4

SAMPLE JOURNAL QUESTIONS

- To what extent is your life affected by government? How do you feel about that level of influence?
- List the benefits and weaknesses of a republic versus a true democracy or a monarchy.
- What right is most important to you? Why?
- What right or rights are relevant to your group's issue? Explain the connection.
- What rights are most important to citizens in influencing policy? Explain your choice.

- What local government issues have been in the news lately? How do they help you understand the power of local government?
- What government official would you most like to interview? Why?
- What office in government would you most like to hold? Explain your choice.
- How will you be able to use what you have learned about the structure of government in your group's project?
- How might you refine your group's goals based on what you have learned about influencing legislation at the national, state, and local levels?
- How prepared are you to influence the government? What else do you need to know to be effective in planning a campaign to influence policy?

VOCABULARY

Anarchy: Absence of government; normally characterized by lawlessness and disorder.

Authoritarian government: System of rule in which the government recognizes no formal limits but may, nevertheless, be restrained by the power of other social institutions.

Authority: The right to control or direct others' actions because of law, morality, custom, or consent.

Bicameral legislature: A legislature that has two legislative chambers.

Checks and balances: Constitutional mechanisms that authorize each branch of government to share powers with the other branches and thereby check their activities.

Civil rights: Fundamental rights of people to be treated fairly by, and to participate in, their government; these rights belong to every member of a society.

Common good: Benefit or interest of a politically organized society as a whole.

Constitution: Written or unwritten body of fundamental law, establishing basic principles, structures, processes, and functions of a government and placing limits upon its actions.

Constitutional government: System of rule in which formal and effective limits are placed on the powers of the government by a constitution.

Constitutional republic: System of government in which power is held by voters and is exercised by elected representatives responsible for promoting the common welfare within the parameters of a constitution.

Due process: Constitutional guarantee that the government will not deprive any person of life, liberty, or property by any unfair or arbitrary action.

Equal protection: A constitutional requirement of the Fourteenth Amendment that protects individuals against unlawful discrimination by the government.

Executive branch: Branch of government that carries out the laws made by the legislative branch and, in the federal government, makes treaties and conducts wars.

Federalism: Division of power between state and federal government; the federal government's powers are listed in the Constitution; remaining powers are relegated to the states.

Independent judiciary: Court system that resolves disputes by adherence to the rule of law and is independent of transient social or political pressure.

Individual rights: Rights possessed by individuals rather than those rights claimed by groups.

Judicial branch: Branch of government that interprets and applies the constitution and laws through a system of courts.

Legislative branch: Branch of government that makes the laws; in the federal government it is Congress, in the Colorado state government it is the General Assembly.

Liberty: Freedom from unjust or undue governmental control.

Limited government: The constitutional principle that governmental power is limited through restrictions imposed by the constitution.

Litigation: Legal proceedings.

Majority rule: A system of making decisions in which the position of the larger number of voters is binding on all (note that in the United States, it is not truly majority—half plus one—rule; in elections, the largest number of votes, even if only a plurality, wins).

Nation: Political organization that claims sovereignty over a defined territory and jurisdiction over the people in that territory.

Natural rights philosophy: Belief that individuals are naturally endowed with basic, human rights, rights that are so much a part of human nature that they cannot be taken away or given up, as opposed to rights conferred by law; the Declaration of Independence states that natural rights include the rights of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

Oligarchy: A government in which a small group exercises control.

Patriotism: Loyalty to one’s country and its values and principles.

Political party: Any group that seeks to elect government officials under a given label.

Public policy: Body of laws, rules, guidelines, and court decisions by which an open society organizes and conducts its affairs.

Representation: The right or privilege of being represented by delegates having a voice in a legislative body.

Republic/Republicanism: A form of government in which power is held by the people; the government is administered by officers elected by the people to serve their interests.

Rule of law: Principle that every member of a society, even a ruler, must follow the law.

Separations of powers: Division of governmental power among several institutions that must cooperate in decision-making.

Social contract: A theory developed by Locke to explain the origin of all legitimate government; this theory posits agreements among all the people in a society to give up part of their freedom to a government in return for protection of their natural rights.

Sovereign: A person or body of persons in whom the supreme power of the state is vested.

Totalitarian government: Government in which one person or party exercises absolute control over all spheres of human life and opposing parties are not permitted to exist.

Unicameral legislature: A legislature that has a single legislative chamber.

Unlimited government: Governmental power not limited through constitutional restrictions.

RESOURCES

The White House, www.whitehouse.gov

The U.S. Senate, www.senate.gov

The U.S. House of Representatives, www.house.gov

The Center on Congress, <http://congress.indiana.edu/>

State of Colorado, Learn More About Colorado Government, <http://www.colorado.gov/colorado-get-involved/participate-government.html>

Colorado Election Center (voter registration forms), <http://www.elections.colorado.gov/DDefault.aspx?tid=415>

National Conference of State Legislatures, <http://www.ncsl.org>

Denver, <http://www.denvergov.org/TabId/37910/TopicId/1230/default.aspx>

Step 1 – Breadth of Government

Goals – Students grasp the importance, power, and pervasiveness of government in their lives.

Means – Teacher leads discussion and sharing of 24-Hour Study entries. The breadth of government should be a focus – everything from the fact that the government sets the official time (dictating when your alarm goes off), the FDA approves your toothpaste, the government controls water flow, makes sure your food isn’t toxic, controls when and where you go to school, etc. Students should be challenged to find a part of their lives or daily activities that are truly unaffected by government. Students should keep their activity journals for use later in the unit.

Step 2 – Civic Virtue

Goals – Students can define a democratic republic and can explain what it means to be a citizen of a democratic republic.

Means – Using historical examples with which students are familiar, teacher highlights differences among power holders in dictatorship, oligarchy, democracy, and republic. Class discusses power and importance of individual people (especially in the face of how much government does) in the different forms of government.

Step 3 – The Constitution and Bill of Rights

Goals – Students grasp the idea of rights and the breakdown of powers in the federal government.

Means – Teacher challenges small groups to use the Constitution and Bill of Rights as the source of information for creating a graphic organizer showing the breakdown of powers in the national government; they should include citizens and state governments in the graphic organizer. Teacher leads discussion of how amendments give citizens the ability to control their lives and affect their government.

Step 4 – The Importance of Rights

Goals – The students understand the importance of rights and the basic rights granted to them.

Means – Students participate in an exercise in which the class is “The People” and two students are “The Government.” The People start out with the full

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protection of the Bill of Rights (you may want to include the extended Bill of Rights – Amendments 13, 14, and 15 – as well as amendments that broadened voting rights). Every five minutes, The People lose one amendment. Before each loss of rights, students discuss what to do and conduct a blind ballot. As rights are lost, The Government can enact restrictions that reflect the loss of rights; for instance, if the people give up the right to assembly, they can be scattered. If they give up the right to free speech, they can be told what to say. If they give up protection from “unreasonable searches and seizures,” people can be arrested and removed from the game. Afterwards, students reflect on what happened and why.

Step 5 – The Federal Legislative Process

Goals – Students learn how they can influence what becomes law at a national level.

Means – Teacher introduces details of how legislation is created, enacted, and enforced at the national level, leading discussions throughout of how to influence the process at different points in the life of the bill and the advantages and disadvantages of exercising influence at each point. The Center for Congress at Indiana University (<http://congress.indiana.edu/>) provides numerous lesson plans for teaching about Congress; one or more of these lesson plans could be used here. A staff member from the office of the Member of Congress who represents your school could be asked to visit the class and interact with students regarding the best way to influence legislation.

Step 6 – The State Legislative Process

Goals – Students learn how they can influence the legislative process at the state level.

Means – Teacher introduces the process of enacting and enforcing laws at the state level. Teacher leads a discussion throughout of how to influence the process at different points in the life of the bill and comparing the process to the national process. The National Conference of State Legislatures (<http://www.ncsl.org>) provides several lessons on state legislatures; one or more of these lessons could be used here. The Senator or Representative who represents your school could be asked to visit the class and interact with students regarding the best way to influence legislation.

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Step 7 – The Local Legislative Process

Goals – Students learn how they can influence the local law-making process.

Means – Teacher describes how legislation is created, enacted, and enforced at the local level. Teacher leads a discussion throughout of how to influence the process at different points in the life of the bill and comparing the process to the state and national levels. Your local city council member or county commissioner could be asked to visit the class and interact with students regarding the best way to influence local legislation.

Step 8 – Comparing Executive Branches

Goals – Students grasp the basic work of the executive branch at the national, state, and local levels and understand the concept of separation of powers.

Means – Teacher leads a discussion contrasting the positions and tasks of the national, state, and local executive branches. Students then return to their 24-Hour Study of activities and, with teacher help, identify which policies influencing their activities are federal, state, or local policies. Based on this analysis, groups consider what level of government they should seek to influence in working on their issues. Students begin exercise of locating names and contact information of their representatives.

Step 9 – Comparing Judicial Branches

Goals – Students grasp the basic work of the judicial branch at the national, state, and local levels and understand the concept of separation of powers.

Means – Teacher leads a discussion contrasting the positions and tasks of the national, state, and local judicial branches of the government. Students dissect which types of issues they might take up with each level of government.

Step 10 – Overview of State and Local Government

Goals – Students grasp the basic structure of the state and local government.

Means – Teacher assigns half of the groups to research the structure of the state government and half to research the structure of local government. Each group should create a graphic organizer that shows ways that citizens can have a voice in

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interacting with each branch of state or local government. Groups can present their work for analysis and critique by other groups.

Step 11 – School Government

Goals – Students understand how to influence the school board and understand the different levels of government surrounding the school.

Means – Students outline school issues that concern them. Teacher describes the different governing bodies in the school system, and students pinpoint who they would need to contact to address each issue.

Step 12 – Direct Democracy

Goals – Students understand the power and purpose of a ballot initiative and its place in the government.

Means – Teacher reviews the concept of representative democracy and asks students to define *direct democracy*. Teacher explains that, in the Western United States, many states have some degree of direct democracy through the initiative process. Through the initiative process, citizens can propose and vote on policies. Teacher presents several examples—both serious and less serious—from recent Colorado elections and students discuss what a “good” ballot initiative must contain and how to market one.

Step 13 – Voting and Voter Registration

Goals – Students understand the power of voting and learn how and why to register to vote.

Means – Teacher introduces voting data and asks students to speculate on the consequences of low voter turnout: Where does that leave the bulk of the power? Students tie in other issues already mentioned during the section. Teacher passes out voter registration forms and leads students through the process of filling them out. The teacher may want to provide stamped envelopes for any students already, or nearly, 18 who wish to officially register.

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Name: _____

24-Hour Study

Teacher: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

For the next 24 hours, record one or two activities you do for each half-hour increment in the grid below; record the activities as you are doing them. For each activity, make note of any laws or other government policies that affect that activity. It will be useful to note where the products you are using are made. Two examples are provided.

Examples:

Time	Activity/Location	Government Law/Policy
6:30 a.m.	Wake up to alarm/home Brush teeth/home	Government establishes time zones. FDA (govt. agency) regulates tooth paste.
8:00 a.m.	Write essay in English class using pencil from Taiwan/school	School district requires four years of English in high school. Government regulates international trade.

Grid to Be Completed:

Time	Activity/Location	Government Law/Policy
7:00 a.m.		
7:30 a.m.		
8:00 a.m.		
8:30 a.m.		
9:00 a.m.		
9:30 a.m.		
10:00 a.m.		

10:30 a.m.		
11:00 a.m.		
11:30 a.m.		
12:00 noon		
12:30 p.m.		
1:00 p.m.		
1:30 p.m.		
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