

Government Power: Do the Actions of Government Affect Me?

U.S. Government

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Grade Level	11th – 12th Grade	**Time Frame**	3-4 class period(s)
Subject	Social Studies	**Duration**	140 minutes
Course	U.S. Government		

Essential Question

Do the actions of the government affect me?

Summary

The purpose of this lesson is to begin the process of helping students visualize the government of the United States as an integral part of everyday existence. Through inquiry-based learning, students will analyze levels of government and identify divisions of power while applying this knowledge to their daily lives. This lesson is intended to help students realize how relevant the study of government is to them and that voting is only the beginning of their interaction with their country's government.

Snapshot

Engage

Students will brainstorm a list of activities in which they participate that they think government does not impact.

Explore

Students will identify the three levels of government and apply that knowledge to their everyday activities.

Explain

Students will identify and describe the following concepts: division of power, separation of power, limited power, and concurrent power. Students will write editorials requesting either more government control or less government control over some aspect of their lives.

Extend

Students will consider the consequences when the three branches of government are in disagreement with each other and will explore the limits, or checks and balances, of their powers.

Evaluate

Students will present and defend their editorial before a panel of their peers.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies: United States Government (9th through 12th grade))

USG.3.2A: enumerated (express) powers
USG.3.2E: concurrent powers.
USG.3.6B: system of checks and balances

Attachments

- Rubric Editorial Paper - Spanish.docx
- Rubric Editorial Paper - Spanish.pdf
- Rubric Editorial Paper.docx
- Rubric Editorial Paper.pdf
- Student Handout 1 Government Regulations - Spanish.docx
- Student Handout 1 Government Regulations - Spanish.pdf
- Student Handout 1 Government Regulations.docx
- Student Handout 1 Government Regulations.pdf
- Student Handout 2 Fundamental Concepts of Power - Spanish.docx
- Student Handout 2 Fundamental Concepts of Power - Spanish.pdf
- Student Handout 2 Fundamental Concepts of Power.docx
- Student Handout 2 Fundamental Concepts of Power.pdf
- Teacher Copy Fundamental Concepts of Power.docx
- Teacher Copy Fundamental Concepts of Power.pdf

Materials

- Student Handout 1 Government Regulations
- Student Handout 2 Fundamental Concepts of Power
- Teacher Copy Fundamental Concepts of Power
- Class copies of Huffington Post article "Defiant Oklahoma Governor Says Ten Commandments Monument Will Stay On State Capitol Grounds" located at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/07/07/oklahoma-ten-commandments_n_7747278.html
- Rubric Editorial Paper

Engage

Ask students to write down or list as many activities as they can think of in which the government plays no role. Encourage students to think about some of the activities in and out of school that they might do in a day. Allow approximately 3 to 5 minutes. There is to be no sharing at this time. Each student should have his or her own list.

Once they each have their own lists, have students get into groups of three. In their groups, students should work together to create a master list of all of their ideas. Allow approximately 7 to 10 minutes to do this.

Teacher's Note

On the master list, students should delete repeated ideas (e.g., If all three students have written down "playing basketball after school," the group should only record "playing basketball after school" once). Students should also merge similar ideas (e.g., If one student has written down "going to church on Sunday" and another student has written down "going to Jum'ah on Friday," these two ideas can be merged to something like "attending religious ceremonies and events").

Explore

Remind students that there are three major levels of government and that each has the power to pass and enact laws. Write the following list on a handout, poster, or on the board. This will help students with the rest of the lesson.

- Federal: Laws passed by the federal government through Congress have to be obeyed by all citizens. The Constitution specifies what types of laws Congress can enact and what responsibilities belong to state government.
- State: Laws passed by the state government, often through legislature or assembly, apply only to the residents of that state or those visiting that state. These laws cannot contradict established federal laws.
- Local: Laws often called "ordinances" and passed by a local city or county government have to be obeyed by the local residents or those visiting the local area.

Distribute "Student Handout 1 Government Regulations" to the groups. Point out that there are blank slots at the end of the handout. Inform students that these open slots are for them to add items from their group-developed lists that might not be on the handout. Ask groups to add at least two things from their group list to the handout.

Allow students to work in their groups to discuss each item on the handout. In the far right column, groups should list if they think the activity to the left is regulated by federal, state, or local governments. Inform students it could be a combination of the three. Give groups approximately 7 to 10 minutes to complete.

After groups have completed their handouts, have students go back to their desks and share answers with one another as a class to ensure all students have an understanding of the material and fill in any gaps in knowledge. To help facilitate this, you could place the words "Federal," "State," and "Local" on the board in three separate columns and have students randomly to come up to share where they would place the government regulations or policies from the handout.

Explain

Distribute "Student Handout 2 Fundamental Concepts of Power" to the students. Explain that this chart will help them understand where all levels of government receive their powers to regulate our lives. Allow students to use the Internet to fill out the chart. A list of Internet resources are provided at the end of this lesson. If the Internet is not available, students can use their textbooks. The powers (and directions) for this activity listed in the left-hand column. This handout can be done in small groups or as individuals.

Once the handout has been completed, discuss it as a class. A few guiding questions could be: Why are powers separated among the different levels of government? Why have certain powers or regulations been established? Why have certain powers been limited?

Teacher's Note

A teacher copy of this handout is included under Attachments. The teacher copy contains suggested answers for your convenience.

Students will write an editorial on one of the following topics. You can also ask students for suggested topics to add to the list to ensure it includes current issues that are relevant to your class. Students should either formulate a stance that there should be more government control or less government control on the issue they have chosen.

- Students must pass an eighth-grade reading test before they can get their driver's licenses.
- State or local government can censor books and magazines to determine what students can read.
- There are restrictions on movies, video games, and music (e.g., rating systems, parental controls, profanity, being able to sell to minors).
- Requiring nutritional information on menus at restaurants.
- Restrictions on only allowing nutritious snacks in school vending machines.
- Requirements on the minimum number of credits needed to graduate high school.
- Mandated school start and end times (and/or dates) and regulations on the number of days students must attend school to pass.

Teacher's Note

Under Attachments is a rubric for scoring the editorial paper. Each student is encouraged to clearly state his or her stance on the issue and include sufficient background information. Make sure students understand very clearly that they should exhibit clear knowledge of the government powers and regulations discussed in the lesson. These aspects of government should serve as support for each student's stance on the issue. Editorial rubrics should be distributed before the students write to ensure that students clearly know the expectations. The editorial can be done as a homework assignment, if classroom time cannot be used. Top editorials should be sent to the school newspaper or a local paper.

Extend

Each branch of government, at the state and federal levels, has a series of **checks and balances** so no one part of government can have greater power over another (limited power). The judicial branch is designed to interpret the constitutional law, whether it is the federal Constitution or a state constitution. Citizens can also appeal laws at any level through the judicial process. As an extension of this lesson, you may wish to share the following news article where the branches of government are in disagreement.

Pass out the Huffington Post article: Defiant Oklahoma Governor Says Ten Commandments Monument Will Stay On State Capitol Grounds. Number students in the class one, two, or three. The handout is three pages long when printed, so all of the students who are numbered one should read the first page, students who are numbered two should read the second page, and students who are numbered three should read the third page. As they read their sections, ask each student to underline what the main ideas of the sections is and circle any information that supports that main idea.

Ask students to move into groups of three with each number represented. Ask students to discuss what they read in their sections with one another. After they have had ample time to understand one another's thoughts on the article, have groups discuss the following questions: What is the main controversy in this article? How has each branch of government addressed the problem--the judicial branch (state supreme court), the executive branch (Gov. Mary Fallin), and the legislative branch (the Oklahoma state legislature)?

Teacher's Note

Students should be able to identify the controversy as whether the Ten Commandments monument should remain on Oklahoma capitol grounds. Students should also be able to identify the positions of the various branches of government and what they have done or propose to do: The judicial branch (the state supreme court) has ordered removal of the monument as it violates the state constitution. The executive branch (Gov. Mary Fallin) claims that she will refuse to follow the state court's decision or that she will impose an executive order for the monument to stay. Members of the state legislative branch (the state legislature) claim that the state constitution should be amended to allow this and that the people should vote on whether or not the state constitution should be amended (an attempt to place the amendment on the Nov. 2016 ballot is currently in progress). You may wish to explain that keeping the monument on public grounds of the state capitol does require that the state constitution be changed at some point in time. Refusal to comply with the court ruling would be a violation of the current law, since the courts have already ruled.

Who is right? How does this affect me? On separate sheets of paper, write a different solution mentioned in the article and post these solutions in different parts of the room (feel free to add and remove solutions):

- Executive: Refuse to follow the court's ruling
- Executive: Create an executive order that allows the monument to stay
- Judicial: Remove the monument because it violates the state constitution
- Legislative: Bring the decision of the monument to a vote of the people
- Legislative: Remove the separation of Church and State from the constitution through an amendment
- Legislative: Impeach the judges who ruled against the monument staying

Ask students to move to the paper solution that they believe is the best solution in this situation. Ask them to discuss their decision with other students who share their choice and explain their rationale for choosing it. Ask them also to discuss how their choice might affect them and other Oklahoma citizens in the long-term. A spokesperson will share a summary of the group discussion with the class.

Update And Additional Extension

Gov. Mary Fallin had the statue removed in 2015. In the 2016 February legislative session, the state house of representatives debated about whether or not an amendment to the constitution should be proposed to eliminate the separation of Church and State. Rather than retain governmental control over the issue, the house voted 86-10 to allow the people of Oklahoma to vote on an amendment in the upcoming election November 2016. The bill to put this issue up for a vote is currently in the state senate. This situation offers an opportunity to expand upon this lesson, should you wish to do so. If you have enough time, and if you and/or your students are interested, you could continue the lesson to explore what could happen should the state constitution change and what goes into creating an amendment to a state constitution. In this particular case, the senate and house are voting on whether or not to allow Oklahomans to vote on changing the state constitution. Should this measure pass the legislature and then be approved by the people, this particular change in the state constitution (to remove the separation of Church and State) would then put the Oklahoma Constitution in conflict with previous U.S. Supreme Court rulings, potentially turning the state battle into a federal one. This exercise could become an interesting way to show how state and federal governments interact when there are disagreements in interpretation. To determine if this extension is relevant to you at this time, please visit the Oklahoma Legislature website to see where HJR 1062 is at in the process now: http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=HJR1062&Session=1600.

Evaluate

Students will present and defend the position they each took in their editorials before a group of their peers. Students should prepare a speech, a PowerPoint or Prezi, or a poster to share their editorial with the class. The time limit for the presentations is ultimately up to the teacher, but suggested time is 2-4 minutes per presentation.

Teacher's Note

The presentation and defense can also be done in front of the class, a panel of teachers, administrators, or a local citizen's group.

Resources

- Fang, Marina. (2015, July 7). Defiant Oklahoma governor says Ten Commandments monument will stay on state capitol grounds. The Huffington Post. Copyright 2015, TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. and HPMG News. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/07/07/oklahoma-ten-commandments_n_7747278.html
- Bill of Rights: http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html
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- Oklahoma State Legislature. (2006, January). Oklahoma statutes. Retrieved from: http://www.oklegislature.gov/osstatuestitle.html
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- The City of Oklahoma City. (n.d.). Municipal Code. Retrieved from: http://www.okc.gov/code/