

Welcome to
*Branches of
Government!*



The words of the Constitution will guide your students as they become experts on the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Branches of the United States government. Using graphic organizers to focus on key information, students learn the make-up and primary responsibilities of each branch, how the Constitution is amended, the role of the Electoral College, and the process of impeachment. They work in jigsaw groups to share what they've learned and participate in whole-class and team activities to understand the government's balance of power and discover how a bill becomes a law.

Designed for grades 5–8, this unit includes two levels of lesson plans. Level One focuses on each branch and its power, while Level Two contains more content for older or more capable students. Activities at both levels can stand alone or can be added to your existing curriculum and materials.

Branches of Government will help your students become more informed and involved citizens. Suddenly today's news stories will have more meaning for them. They will recognize that learning about the Constitution not only continues to be very relevant, but is also essential to the preservation of their American liberties.

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Purpose and Overview

What is *Branches of Government*?

Branches of Government is an interactive unit designed for grades 5 through 8. There are two levels, both organized so that you can tailor the content to your particular students' interests, abilities, grade level, and available time. Level One provides an overview of the branches and their basic powers. Level Two provides a more comprehensive description of the branches and their powers. Both include the essential aspects of our system of checks and balances. Your students will work in teams of six, in expert/jigsaw groupings, and as a whole class. They will use excerpts from the first seven articles of the United States Constitution as their primary source and participate in an interactive activity to learn how a bill becomes a law. Students will also create graphic organizers to better understand and apply the content.



What do students learn?

The nationwide movement for high standards has not only determined what students should learn, but also has mandated that students demonstrate what they know. We use national standards to identify and communicate learning objectives for each Interact unit. The content taught in *Branches of Government* is the target of most state frameworks for civics and social studies. The unit provides opportunities for students to become familiar with the Constitution and to demonstrate their understanding of the three branches of government and the balance of power among them. The cooperative work required in expert/jigsaw groupings and cooperative activities addresses standards collectively described as Applied Learning. The activities within this unit are correlated to national education standards.

Purpose and Overview

By using *Branches of Government*, your students will gain and experience the following:

Knowledge

- Become familiar with a brief history of the writing of the Constitution
- Describe the make-up and primary responsibilities of the Legislative Branch and the way in which it shares powers and functions with the other branches of the federal government
- Describe the make-up and primary responsibilities of the Executive Branch and the way in which it shares powers and functions with the other branches of the federal government
- Describe the make-up and primary responsibilities of the Judicial Branch and the way in which it shares powers and functions with the other branches of the federal government
- Describe how a bill becomes a law
- Recite the Preamble to the Constitution
- Learn the names of the President and Vice President
- Learn the names of their Senators and Representative (optional for Level One)
- Describe how the Constitution is amended (optional for Level One)
- Describe the role of the Electoral College when electing a President (optional for Level One)
- Describe the process of Impeachment (optional for Level One)

Skills

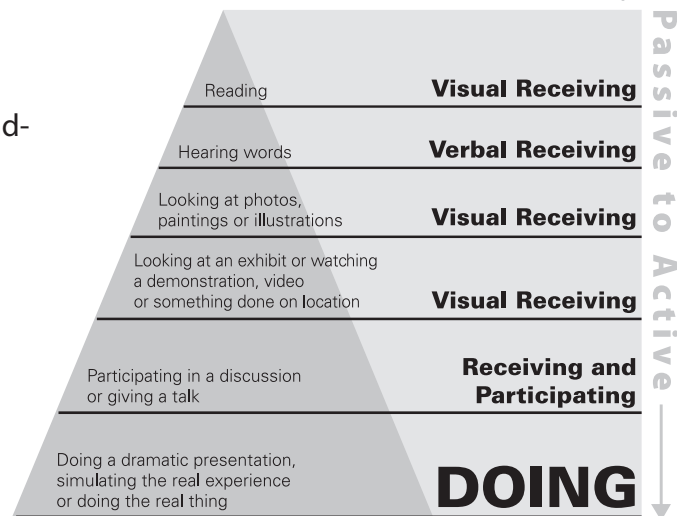
- Read a primary source (excerpts from the Constitution) with understanding
- Create and use graphic organizers to learn and share content
- Work cooperatively within a team, as part of an expert/jigsaw group, or a member of a whole class
- Learn how to contact their President, Representative, and Senators by phone, mail, or e-mail
- Organize and complete individual tasks

Attitudes

- Appreciate the continued relevance of learning about the United States Constitution
- Appreciate the importance of maintaining a balance of power among the three branches
- Appreciate the value of using graphic organizers as study tools

Experiential Learning

Students learn best through experience. Research shows that student retention and understanding increase as students become more involved and engaged in the learning process, regardless of whether they are high achievers, reluctant learners, or second-language learners. By working in cooperative groups, students assist each other in the learning process.



Level of Involvement

Adapted from Edgar Dale's "Cone of Experience"

How are students organized?

Students are organized into heterogeneous teams of six. During jigsaw activities, members of these teams separate and join expert groups who study a specific topic or complete a specific task. When that work is completed, the expert groups disband, and members return to their original teams to share (jigsaw) what they have learned.

Though much of their work is done collectively, students are responsible for learning the material so they can independently complete a End-of-Unit Assessment. Throughout the unit, students will convene as a class for review, debriefing, and assessment.

How much time is required?

The suggested time frame is 10 days of instruction. However, if your students need more time to complete a day's lesson, lessons can be extended into the next day. If your students are more capable or you have less available time, the schedule can be compressed by allowing students to work on activities at home. The time frame could also be compressed by eliminating select activities.

Purpose and Overview

How is learning assessed?

Assessment opportunities are embedded throughout the unit. Every day, students must interpret content, share their understanding, and create graphic organizers when they “jigsaw.” Informal assessments might include observing students as they work and noting participation in whole-class discussions or debriefings. Graphic organizers can be informally evaluated or graded. We suggest having students submit two samples of their best work for evaluation at the end of the unit. A formal assessment composed of a prepared test with both short answer and brief essay questions is provided. Use the rubrics for assessing cooperative group work (Expert/Jigsaw Rubric) and creating graphic organizers (**Graphic Organizer Rubric**).

What do Rubric Scores Mean?

- 4 Exceeds Expectations**—This rating describes work that exceeds the standard. The descriptor includes words such as “consistently,” “complete,” “with detail,” “actively,” and “willingly.” Students who earn a “4” demonstrate leadership and knowledge during participation in the unit activities. Their performance and/or product are significantly better than what was required or expected.
- 3 Meets Expectations**—This rating describes work that meets the standard with quality. The descriptors lack some of the positive adjectives of a “4,” but this student has mastered the content or skill and can demonstrate his or her understanding in an application setting.
- 2 Nearly There**—This rating describes work that almost meets the standard. Sometimes inconsistent effort or a misconception of the content will result in a “2” rating. This student needs to try a little harder, or needs to revise his or her work in order to meet the standard described.
- 1 Incomplete**—This rating describes work that has not yet met the standard in content and/or skill. This student will require more instruction and another opportunity to demonstrate a knowledge or skill, or will require alternative instruction and assessment.

Why Use *Branches of Government*?

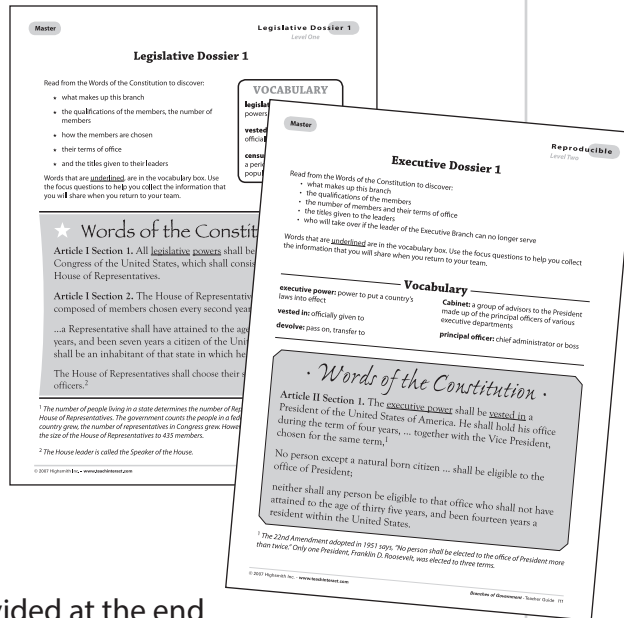
Branches of Government frees students from just reading textbooks and listening to lectures by providing engaging activities. It also allows students to take charge of their own learning and take responsibility to share what they learn with fellow classmates. They will work with a primary source (the Constitution) and gain confidence from what might have been a daunting document. As an added bonus, this unit also teaches students to create and use graphic organizers—a key study skill that can be transferred to other learning situations.

Differentiation

This unit, like all Interact products, offers differentiated instruction through a range of activities and assessment options. Students learn and experience knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes as they interact with important social studies curriculum.

Specific ways to differentiate:

- Choose Level One or Level Two. Younger students may do the work required in Level Two, although you may have to allow 15–20 days to complete all the activities.
- Review the vocabulary before students begin reading the Dossiers, which include the words of the Constitution.
- Edit the Dossiers to highlight information most important to your curriculum.
- Use the summary statements provided at the end of the days' lessons to help students focus on the most important information. Make student copies of the summary statements or post them around the room. Have students represent the summary statements visually and share their graphic organizers or drawings with their team or the class. Note that the summary statements are simplified for Level One.
- Use the blank graphic organizers provided so your students only have to fill in the information or allow students to create their own graphic organizers.
- Provide a set of possible wording for students to include in graphic organizers.
- Allow students class time to write and share reflection pieces using the prompts provided or ones that you create.
- Allow students to use a different multiple intelligence to present ideas or reflections.
- Engage in a fun activity called Jeopardy Review to help students review content.



Standards

- Engage in the extension activities such as Kinesthetic Preamble.
- Use oral debriefings as pre-writing activities for answering essay questions.
- Send study pairs to attend the expert groups.
- Allow students to answer assessment questions orally.
- Encourage or require students and teams to bring in news stories that relate to the balance of powers or other topics covered in the unit (**What's in the News?** activity). Use these news stories to reinforce the content and ongoing relevance.
- Have students work in expert groups, but instead of using the jigsaw model, have them work as a whole class to create graphic organizers with you.

Components

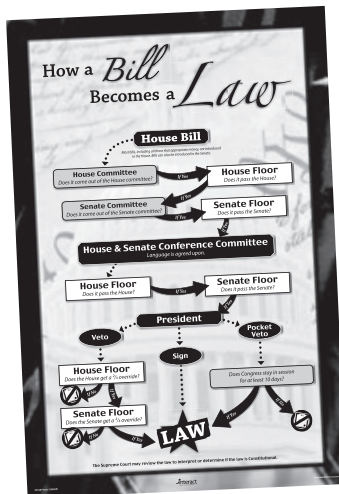
The Branches of Government Package

The Branches of Government complete package includes:

- Teacher Guide
- How a Bill Becomes a Law Poster

The **Teacher Guide** has all the information you need to run a successful unit. It includes complete preparation and setup instructions; a unit time chart; daily lesson plans; answer keys; and reproducible masters, assessments, and rubrics. A minimum amount of additional materials are required and outlined in the next section.

Teacher Guide



The **How a Bill Becomes a Law Poster** shows the path that a bill must take through Congress, through the President, and potentially on to the Supreme Court. This colorful poster can be displayed throughout the unit and used to keep track of each team's bill as it works to become a law in the How a Bill Becomes a Law interactive activity.

How a Bill Becomes a Law Poster

Within the Teacher Guide you will find the following six elements. It is important to be familiar with these elements and how you will use them.

Dossiers

The Dossiers contain the words of the Constitution, the primary source expert groups will use to learn about the branches of government. The words of the Constitution are excerpts from the first seven Articles and are arranged by topic rather than Article. During an activity, an expert group might be looking at three different sections of the Constitution—this re-organization is intentional. It allows students to make more connections and see the whole plan that the Founding Fathers had in mind.

IMPORTANT NOTE: To help students understand the language of these excerpts, original words that have been changed by Amendments were substituted with the amended words. If the original wording was redundant or obscure, it was deleted and/or summaries were provided as necessary.

Components

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers help students create connections and hierarchy, and separate the most important information from the extraneous. Graphic organizers increase comprehension and retention for all students, but especially for visual learners.

After a day of lessons, students often have a jumble of “stuff” in their brain inventory. Unfortunately “cool” factoids are sometimes all they take away from your carefully planned lessons. (For example, many students can’t mark the times of ancient Egypt and the building of the pyramids on a time line, but they surely can tell you that when preparing a mummy, the surgeons reached up a nostril and pulled the brain out!) Therefore, it is essential that students organize their learning. Graphic organizers are one of the most effective tools used to accomplish this.

If you want to learn more about graphic organizers, go to www.teachinteract.com for a list of resources.

Summary Statements

At the end of each lesson, there is a short list of summary statements. This is the minimum information that all students must know and understand by the end of this unit.

Reflection Pieces

There are prompts for reflections in each day’s lesson, although you may choose to write your own prompts. Research shows that students remember more when they are asked to write in reflection. If there is no time during class, ask students to write reflection pieces for homework.

Current Events

Discussing current events relating to the Constitution is a worthwhile activity. Because the Constitution remains so relevant, your students will have no problem finding news stories about the branches of government. Every day, new bills are being introduced and crucial votes are being taken. There are also often big stories about challenges to the balance of the power among the branches. Consider discussing current events for a few minutes each day or devoting an extra day where students discuss the stories they have found within their team. Use the **What’s in the News?** handout.

Extension Activities

Some extension activities are described at the end of a day’s lesson. Although these are not necessary to completing the goals of the unit, they do provide opportunities for deeper understanding.