

GOVERNMENT

Unit Description and Length:

5 weeks

This unit focuses on the structure, roles, and responsibilities of the United States government. Students learn how government is organized to evaluate whether the government's structure supports its ability to fulfill the purposes espoused in the Preamble of the Constitution.

Standards:

C.1.1	Describe reasons why government is necessary, explaining competing ideas about the role of government in society
C.2.1	Analyze ways in which the purposes of the United States government, as defined in the United States Constitution, are achieved
C.2.2	Describe the structure and functions of the federal government as stated in the United States Constitution
C.2.3	Explain the distribution of powers, responsibilities, and limits on the United States government
C.2.4	Cite the qualifications, terms of office, roles, and duties for appointed and elected officials
C.2.5	Explain the processes and strategies of how a bill becomes a law at the federal level
C.2.7	Explain the role of regulatory and independent government agencies in American society
C.2.8	Compare and contrast the functions of various state and local governments in terms of tax code, political structure, and election procedures

Content:

- Organization of government based on the text of the Constitution.
- How the legislative process works.

Claim(s):

Does the government's structure help or hinder it from fulfilling the purposes espoused in the Preamble? (Task 3)

Sub-Claim(s):

- How does the U.S. Constitution fulfill the purposes laid out in the Preamble? (Task 1)
- How effective is the system of checks and balances? (Task 2)

Instructional Task:

Task 1 - Structure of the Government

Task 2 – Legislative Process/Mock Congress

Task 3 – Culminating Task

(OPTIONAL) Government Unit 2 Consumable Handout- This is provided with all the handouts for unit 1 attached together if the teacher wants to create a consumable for students.

Task 1 -

Structure of Government (10-12 Class Periods)

Standards:

C.2.1	Analyze ways in which the purposes of the United States government, as defined in the United States Constitution, are achieved
C.2.2	Describe the structure and functions of the federal government as stated in the United States Constitution
C.2.3	Explain the distribution of powers, responsibilities, and limits on the United States government
C.2.4	Cite the qualifications, terms of office, roles, and duties for appointed and elected officials

Connection to the Claim: Students investigate the organization of government by analyzing the text of the Constitution and working in groups to research and create presentations about the parts of government.

Claim: Does the government’s structure help or hinder it from fulfilling the purposes espoused in the Preamble?

Sub-claim Question: How does the U.S. Constitution fulfill the purposes laid out in the Preamble?

Academic Vocabulary: Preamble, bicameral, amend, federalism, enumerated, concurrent, reserved, constructionist, implied

Materials:

[The Constitution of the United States with Graphic Organizers](#)

(Optional) [Three Branches of Government Graphic Organizer](#)

Online version of the Constitution at <http://constitutionus.com>

National Constitution Center’s [Interactive Constitution](#)

[Exemplar Research Topic](#)

[Social Studies Extended Response Rubric-Constitution](#)

Instructional Process:

Part 1: The Preamble

1. Ask students to submit one or two problems they would like government to resolve. Responses should be brief, such as “fix streets.” The teacher should compile responses into a spreadsheet, grouping similar answers and removing redundancies. The spreadsheet will be revisited at the end of the task.
2. Say, “In this unit, we will be examining the structure of our government to answer the

question: Does the government's structure help or hinder it from fulfilling the purposes espoused in Preamble?"

3. Project and read aloud the Preamble to the US Constitution: a. "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."
4. Reread the Preamble, stopping after each comma. Ask students to explain each phrase.
5. **Developing a Claim:** Provide students with access to [Giving Meaning to the Preamble: Common Interpretation](#) by Erwin Chemerinsky and Michael Stokes Paulsen available as part of the National Constitution Center's [Interactive Constitution](#). Direct students to read independently.
 - Use the website below to delve into the Preamble using higher order thinking skills. *"Discuss what the students think the words of the Preamble mean. Then divide the class into six small groups. Assign each group a phrase from the Preamble to interpret and provide each group with documentary evidence of what the phrase means (sources listed below). It's the job of group members to share the document they were given and to offer their own interpretation of what their assigned phrase means"*

edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/preamble-constitution-how-do-you-make-more-perfect-union#section-16230

6. **Formative Assessment:** Briefly discuss as a class. Possible questions:
 - What is the relationship of the Preamble to the rest of the Constitution?
 - Why are we using the Preamble to evaluate how effectively the government does its job?

Part 2: A Glance at the Constitution

7. To activate prior learning, ask students to identify the three branches of government and briefly describe the role of each branch. Ask students to provide a definition for separation of powers and checks and balances.
8. Compare student explanations to the following definitions:
 - separation of powers - the sharing of powers among three separate branches of government
 - checks and balances - a system that allows one branch of government to limit the exercise of power by another branch; requires the different parts of government to work together
9. Provide students with access to the text from ["The 'Federal' in Federalism"](#) (labeled Reading p.1-3) by [iCivics](#). (iCivics requires a FREE account creation to access their lessons and materials)
Direct them to read independently. Review key terms (*federalism, reserved powers, concurrent powers, expressed/enumerated powers, implied powers, supremacy clause, and necessary and proper clause*) and briefly discuss as a class.
10. Using the *Who's Got the Power* graphic organizer contained within the U.S. Constitution handout, students will participate in Constitution scavenger hunt to discover the roles of the three branches of government. (**Optional Graphic Organizer:** Three Branches of Government)

Part 3: A Deep Dive into the U.S. Constitution

11. Say: "Your goal for this task is to work within a small group to perform research and develop a presentation about one of the following parts of government:

- Congress
- the presidency
- the courts
- the bureaucracy
- state and local government.

Your first source of information will be The Constitution of the United States, so let us begin by taking a close look at the text."

12. Before assigning groups and topics, provide each student with a copy of The Constitution of the United States and direct them engage in section by section and develop GIST statements that summarize each section connecting to the sub-claim for task 1. Consider having students annotate the document as they will be utilizing this document throughout the course. **Note: Instruct students to save their copies of the Constitution for use throughout the course.**
13. Using different colored highlighters, pens, or sticky notes, have students identify which articles and sections deal with each of the presentation topics. Develop, explain, and project a system of annotations for students to use, such as Q=qualification for holding office, TO=term of office, EP=expressed power, RP=reserved power, CP=concurrent power, CB=example of checks and balances, etc. Also ask students to underline any terms or phrases they do not understand. Note: Later, during the research period, students should be provided access to the online version available at <http://constitutionus.com> that includes scroll-over definitions and the Interactive Constitution provided by the National Constitution Center that explains how amendments affected the original text.
14. Play the "US Constitution Power Grab Game" to reinforce understanding of the system of checks and balances.

Part 4: The Research

15. **Developing a claim:** Divide the class into mixed ability groups in order to research and address the claim *How does the U.S. Constitution fulfill the purposes laid out in the Preamble?*
16. **Formative Assessment:** Direct groups to create 20-25 minute presentations that research the following aspects of government structure as it relates to content claim:
- Roles and responsibilities
 - Structure/organization
 - Evolution over time
 - Issues
17. Set expectations for research
- Use the text of the US Constitution including amendments
 - Use relevant chapters (chapters 3 and 11-15) of OpenStax American Government.
 - *For group assigned to state and local government, direct students to focus the "evolution over time" and "issues" portions of presentation on federalism. See Chapter 3 of OpenStax American Government.*
 - Use their own textbooks.
18. Research Process
- Provide time for students to consider the scope of the assignment, plan, and subdivide the work within their groups before allowing them to begin

researching. *Note: To improve collaboration, consider the use of small group contracts and peer and self-evaluation tools, such as the examples provided by [Carnegie Mellon University](#).*

- In each group students self-assign roles to complete project, such as leader/facilitator, recorder, proofreader/editor, fact-checker, etc.; however, “presenter” should not be one of the roles because all students should be required to speak during the presentation.
 - Provide guidance for students in developing research skills, including creating effective search questions for digital research, how to identify accurate and credible sources, the importance of reviewing multiple sources to corroborate information, how to engage in ethical use of information including creating a list of sources used, etc.
19. Direct students to conduct their research.
20. Provide time for peer review prior to presentation.
21. During the presentation, direct students to:
- Record key terms and notes on the Organization of Government handout (one per presentation).
 - Write down questions and comments for the post-presentation discussion.
22. **Formative Assessment:** Following each presentation, conduct a class discussion. Use the discussions to focus student attention on the most significant concepts and areas of controversy. Fill in major content gaps, as necessary. Possible questions:
- The framers intended the legislative branch to be the most important branch of government. In recent times, Congress has had low public approval ratings. Are extended periods of Congressional “gridlock” a reflection of the “deliberativeness” the framers intended or a structural/design failure of the legislative branch?
 - How and why has the power of the executive branch changed? Is the increase in executive power over time a necessary development or a cause for concern? How powerful is the president today?
 - US courts serve a dual purpose: protecting individual rights and protecting the sanctity of the Constitution. To what extent do the structure and procedures of the judiciary support each of those purposes?
 - Should the bureaucracy be considered the “fourth branch of government”? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the federal bureaucracy? How accurate are public perceptions of the bureaucracy?
 - What are the advantages and disadvantages of the federalist system for the United States? Do multiple levels of subnational governments serve the interests of citizens?
23. Project the spreadsheet created at the beginning of the task. Add a column titled, “Parts of Government Involved.” Discuss as a class and take notes on the spreadsheet. If time constraints prevent discussion of the entire list, focus on examples that illustrate the interrelationship between the parts of government and the complexity of resolving problems.
24. **Summative Assessment:** Direct students to write an argumentative essay that answers the sub-claim question: How does the U.S. Constitution fulfill the purposes laid out in the Preamble? Students should use their U.S. Constitution Handout to research in addition to the class discussions to provide evidence for their argument. Use the social studies extended response rubric to grade this assessment.

The Legislative Process (10-12 Class Periods)

Standards:

C.2.1	Analyze ways in which the purposes of the United States government, as defined in the United States Constitution, are achieved
C.2.2	Describe the structure and functions of the federal government as stated in the United States Constitution
C.2.3	Explain the distribution of powers, responsibilities, and limits on the United States government
C.2.5	Explain the processes and strategies of how a bill becomes a law at the federal level

Connection to the Claim: Students learn how a bill becomes a law and evaluate the effectiveness of the legislative process in meeting the goals of the Preamble.

Claim: Does the government's structure help or hinder it from fulfilling the purposes espoused in the Preamble?

Sub-claim Question: How are bills created and passed through the branches of government?

Academic Vocabulary: Bill, Standing committee, Subcommittee, Joint committee, Special committee, Conference committee, Pigeonhole, Filibuster, override

Materials:

[The Structure of the Legislative Branch Graphic Organizer](#)
[Conversation Stems and Discussion Tracker](#)
[Social Studies Extended Response Rubric-Legislative Process](#)

Multimedia Sources:

[I'm Just a Bill- School House Rock](#)

Instructional Process:

1. Say, "Now that you have learned about how government is organized, we will take a closer look at the federal legislative process by simulating what it is like to be a member of the House of Representatives. Each of you will draft a bill addressing an issue that concerns you. Then you will attempt to shepherd your bill through committee. Bills that make it through committee will be debated on the floor of the House." *Note: Teachers with more than one section of the Civics course or teachers who collaborate together may elect to have some classes act as the Senate, so bills that make it through one chamber may be debated in the other chamber. If this option is chosen, be sure to have students follow rules and procedures appropriate for each chamber.*
2. **Building Background:** Create a gallery walk by providing students with access (posters or computer lab-preferred) to "[First Day of Congress](#)," "[House Leadership](#)," and "[Member Committees](#)" from the Kids in the House website. With a partner, students will complete the graphic organizer based on the structure of the Legislative Branch. to learn about the legislative process. *Note: Teachers should review "[How Our Laws Are Made](#)" for a more-in depth look at the legislative process.*
3. **Optional:** Watch some short clips from [C-SPAN](#) to see floor debate in the House or Senate
4. Develop rules for the mock Congress. Use the [YMCA Louisiana Youth Legislature's debate procedures](#) (designed for Louisiana model state legislature), [National Model Congress's](#)

[Rules and Procedures](#), and [Princeton Model Congress's rules](#) as models.

5. Provide students with copies of the rules they will be following and direct them to read independently. Discuss the basics of parliamentary procedure.
6. Watch a few minutes of "[Minimum Wage Act \('For' Side Only\) - AW Model Congress 2016](#)" for students to grasp the concept. Then forward to 23:00 to watch the vote at the end.
7. Using the established rules, practice debating a sample bill, such as "[An Act to Reduce Government Subsidy Spending](#)" from Princeton Model Congress. Project the bill, direct students to read independently, and then follow the rules established for floor debate.
8. Set expectations for research, bill content, and participation during the simulation. Explain to students how they should conduct their research (e.g., What is the process for research? What are their due dates? What are their deliverables? How will you grade their research?) and provide them with needed materials.
9. Divide the class into groups of 4-5 using an established classroom routine. Determine how many standing committees the size of your class can support. Assign students to committees.
10. Direct students to research and draft a bill of relevance to their committee. Provide students with access to the [bill drafting instructions](#) and [research links](#) provided by Princeton's Model Congress. Early in the drafting process, check to ensure each student's bill idea is appropriate for the student's committee and the US Congress to consider.
11. As needed, support students in developing research skills, including answering a question (including a self-generated question) or solving a problem; narrowing or broadening the inquiry when appropriate; synthesizing multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation; gathering relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assessing the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrating information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
12. Have students submit completed bills in digital form. Make enough copies of student bills for each committee member to have a print copy. Allow students to choose committee chairs and to elect a Speaker of the House. The teacher will serve as Clerk. Set and announce time limits for debate.
13. Instruct students to consider bills in their committees. Committee chairs are responsible for setting the docket and acting as timekeeper. Circulate to ensure students use parliamentary procedure and adhere to timing guidelines.
14. Direct students to debate bills that are successfully passed out of committee with the full House. Allow the chosen Speaker to preside, intervening as little as possible. Project a digital version of the bill under consideration, so it can be amended in real time. Track student participation during the simulation and assign grades based on established criteria.
15. **Formative Assessment:** Then, as a class, conduct a discussion connecting the simulation back to the unit question: Does the government's structure help or hinder it from fulfilling the purposes espoused in Preamble? Encourage students to use the conversation stems during the discussion and provide evidence from the sources or outside knowledge to support their answers. Possible questions
 - a. What would happen next to the bills the House passed?
 - b. How likely is a piece of legislation to survive all stages of the process?
 - c. Which aspects of the simulation were most and least realistic?
16. **Summative Assessment:** Conclude the discussion by asking students to reflect on the quality of the discussion by answering the claim question: how are bills created and passed through the branches of government? Have students use evidence from their experience throughout the Legislative Process. Use the social studies extended response rubric on content and claims to score the response.

Optional Extension: The [Legislative Process through iCivics](#) can be conducted to further students education on the process of How a Bill Becomes a Law.

Task 3 -

Culminating Task (1 class period)

Description: Students write an essay addressing the unit claims question. Students write a one-page essay in response to the following question: Does the government’s structure help or hinder it from fulfilling the purposes espoused in the Preamble?

Standards:

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C.2.2	Describe the structure and functions of the federal government as stated in the United States Constitution
C.2.3	Explain the distribution of powers, responsibilities, and limits on the United States government
C.2.4	Cite the qualifications, terms of office, roles, and duties for appointed and elected officials
C.2.5	Explain the processes and strategies of how a bill becomes a law at the federal level
C.2.6	Differentiate between loose and strict constructionist interpretation of the Constitution by examining the meaning and implications of the Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments
C.2.7	Explain the role of regulatory and independent government agencies in American society
C.2.8	Compare and contrast the functions of various state and local governments in terms of tax code, political structure, and election procedures

Connection to the Claim: Students will write an essay to evaluate if the choices made by the Founding Fathers fulfilled the purposes found in the Preamble.

Claim: Does the government’s structure help or hinder it from fulfilling the purposes espoused in the Preamble?

Materials:

[Essay Writing Outline](#)

Government Extended Response Checklist

[Social Studies Extended Response Rubric-help/hinder based on the principles in the Preamble](#)

1. Using sources from Tasks 1 and 2, students will create an in depth response using the following question: Does the government’s structure help or hinder it from fulfilling the purposes espoused in the Preamble?
2. Consider reviewing the following outline with your students to transition them into the writing

process where needed. Using the buckets and thesis builder, model for students how to create bucket labels and develop a thesis based on the information presented in the tasks.

3. Have your students consider the following information as they craft their response:
 - separation of powers and checks and balances contained within the U.S. Constitution (Task 1)
 - The legislative process (Task 2)
4. Use the social studies extended response rubric to grade this assessment. Note: Customize the Content portion of the rubric for this assessment. Use the Claims portion of the rubric as written.