

Upper Grades- Lesson Topic: National Studies (United States)

Unit Description:

In this unit, students will learn about the three branches of government in the United States and explore how the balance of power between these three branches work. In this unit, three classrooms from three different locations will be involved in learning about the three branches of government and then will participate in an interactive videoconferencing session. Each classroom will be given a graphic organizer with the three branches of government and then each of the three participating classrooms will be assigned a branch of government to study. Each classroom will gather information about their assigned branch of government by reading, watching videos, and analyzing images related to their assigned branch of government and complete their portion of the graphic organizer. Finally, the three classrooms will participate in a videoconferencing session where they will compare the three branches of government, complete the graphic organizer, and discuss the importance of checks and balances.

The first step in successfully implementing this unit into the classroom is to establish partnerships with participating classrooms in the United States. The Cooperative Educational Services Agency (CESA 7) and The Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration (CILA) in the technology tools sections list thousands of different schools in areas inside the United States that have access to videoconferencing and their contact information. The classrooms listed in these directories are interested in establishing educational partnerships and should be

contacted before the beginning of the year to effectively plan for an upcoming unit. The planning needed for this type of unit is extensive the first time that it is completed, however, once initial partnerships are established they can be strengthened and continued for years to come. Use the sample letter in the resources section for an example of what could be sent as an initial contact to potential cooperating classrooms. Videoconferencing for this unit is effective because students from different states will have different perspectives on the federal government depending on majority political party, size of the state government, and how the federal government has influenced their state in the past. Some states will have similar perspectives, but others will have more contrasting opinions (For example, California and Texas) and it is important for students to take these multiple perspectives into consideration when completing this unit. After all, the federal government is based on a representative democracy where differing opinions can be expressed and heard with respect.

Objectives:

- ⌚ Students will understand the formation of the United States government and the reason for establishing the Executive, Judicial, and Congressional branches.
- ⌚ Students will gain an in-depth understanding of the three branches of government and discuss the importance of each.

- ⌚ Students will understand why checks and balances are needed to protect the ideals of democracy and relate this importance to modern American government.

Standards (California State Content Standards):

CA- California K-12 Academic Content Standards
Subject : History & Social Science
Grade : Grade Three
Area : Continuity and Change Students in grade three learn more about our connections to the past and the ways in which particularly local, but also regional and national, government and traditions have developed and left their marks on current society, providing common memories. Emphasis is on the physical and cultural landscape of California, including the study of American Indians, the subsequent arrival of immigrants, and the impact they have had in forming the character of our contemporary society.
Sub-Strand 3.4: Students understand the role of rules and laws in our daily lives and the basic structure of the U.S. government.
Standard 1: Determine the reasons for rules, laws, and the U.S. Constitution; the role of citizenship in the promotion of rules and laws; and the consequences for people who violate rules and laws.
Standard 2: Discuss the importance of public virtue and the role of citizens, including how to participate in a classroom, in the community, and in civic life.
Standard 4: Understand the three branches of government, with an emphasis on local government.
Grade : Grade Four
Area : California: A Changing State Students learn the story of their home state, unique in American history in terms of its vast and varied geography, its many waves of immigration beginning with pre-Columbian societies, its continuous diversity, economic energy, and rapid growth. In addition to the specific treatment of milestones in California history, students examine the state in the context of the rest of the nation, with an emphasis on the U.S. Constitution and the relationship between state and federal government.
Sub-Strand 4.5: Students understand the structures, functions, and powers of the local, state, and federal governments as described in the U.S. Constitution.
Standard 1: Discuss what the U.S. Constitution is and why it is important (i.e., a written document that defines the structure and purpose of the U.S. government and describes the shared powers of federal, state, and local governments).
Grade : Grade Five
Area : United States History and Geography: Making a New Nation Students in grade five study the development of the nation up to 1850, with an emphasis on the people who were already here, when and from where others arrived, and why they came. Students learn about the colonial government founded on Judeo-Christian principles, the ideals of the Enlightenment, and the English traditions of self-government. They recognize that ours is a nation that has a constitution that derives its power from the people, that has gone through a revolution, that once sanctioned slavery, that experienced conflict over land with the original inhabitants, and that experienced a westward movement that took its people across the continent. Studying the cause, course, and consequences of the early explorations through the War for Independence and western expansion is central to students' fundamental understanding of how the principles of the American republic form the basis of a pluralistic society in which individual rights are secured.
Sub-Strand 5.7: Students describe the people and events associated with the development of the U.S. Constitution and analyze the Constitution's significance as the foundation of the American republic.
Standard 3: Understand the fundamental principles of American constitutional democracy, including how the government derives its power from the people and the primacy of individual liberty.

Standard 4: Understand how the Constitution is designed to secure our liberty by both empowering and limiting central government and compare the powers granted to citizens, Congress, the president, and the Supreme Court with those reserved to the states.

Standard 5: Discuss the meaning of the American creed that calls on citizens to safeguard the liberty of individual Americans within a unified nation, to respect the rule of law, and to preserve the Constitution.

Sample Lesson:

Individual Instruction: For the individual instruction time, students will participate in the [Colonial Williamsburg virtual field trip](#) (see above technology tools section) titled “The Balance of Power”. This interactive virtual experience provides students a fun and engaging way to learn about the three branches of government and how checks and balances work. Students will receive an overview of the three branches of government during this virtual field trip but will do more extensive research on their assigned branch of government and complete their respective portion of the graphic organizer.

Whole Group Instruction: Armed with a basic knowledge of the three branches of government and a basic understanding of checks and balances, the three classrooms will participate in a videoconferencing session where they will relay their findings with each other and collaborate to complete the missing sections in the graphic organizer. They will then discuss the implications of checks and balances and how they affect the political sphere in modern day America. If there is time, an interesting activity to do as a whole group to maximize student understanding of this topic would be to provide a scenario for the classes to complete acting as their respective branch. The teachers could provide a problem for the students to consider where each branch has to use their power to make the situation possible. The students

could see firsthand how the balance of power works by having to collaborate with the other “branches” (classrooms) and will likely have interesting discussions that come from varying perspectives of the federal government and its role in the daily lives of Americans.

Assessing the Tool:

1. Was the tool simple to use as a teacher? For the students?

2. Did the use of this tool increase student global awareness?

3. What could be done differently to maximize the effectiveness of the tool?

Assessing the Lesson:

1. Did this lesson enhance student multicultural understanding?
2. Did this lesson develop collaborative skills amongst the students?
3. Did this lesson allow students to reach an understanding of the overlying concepts and objectives?