

# Why Do We Separate Power?

## Summary of Unit

This unit follows the study of the American Revolution, the Critical Era and Constitutional Convention. Students have explored and asked questions about the Constitution. They are familiar with the structure; articles, sections, clauses and amendments. In this unit they will read parts of the Constitution more closely to learn about the three branches of government. They will gain a basic understanding of the rules, the responsibilities of the three branches and explore the concept of checks and balances. The students will engage in a simulation to give them a deeper understanding of the concepts. Students will create a metaphor for the Constitution. Finally, students will read about the debate over the creation of the separation of power.

## Essential Questions

- How does the Constitution divide up governmental powers?
- What is the purpose of the separation of powers?
- Whose power does the system of checks and balances limit?
- Why is the idea of separation of powers considered to be a democratic idea?
- Is it important for a government to have a system of checks and balances?
- Why did the Framers create the separation of powers?

## Massachusetts History & Social Sciences Frameworks

In the most recently accepted frameworks (Oct 2002) the eighth grade curriculum was not specifically addressed. Instead eighth grade was grouped with the high school grades. It is up to the individual school districts to determine what will be the eighth grade curriculum based on the pathway suggestions. Our district is developing a Civics program for the eighth grade. After consulting with the high schools teachers it was decided that eighth grade would introduce certain concepts that would support the high school curriculum. For that reason learning standards for this lesson include standards from different grade levels and courses.

Learning Standards

**USG 2.2** Analyze and interpret central ideas on government, individual rights, and the common good in founding document of the United States.

**US 1.14** Explain the characteristics of American democracy, including the concepts of popular sovereignty and constitutional government, which includes representative institutions, federalism, separation of powers, shared powers, checks and balances, and individual rights.

## Class Description

My eighth grade history classes are heterogeneously grouped. My average class size ranges from 20-25 students and meets daily for 43 minutes. An average class may contain three to four students on educational plans.

**Lesson objectives:**

1. Students will explore the constitution using a scavenger-style worksheet.
2. Students will identify the duties of the three branches of government.
3. Students will create examples of check and balances.
4. Students will participate in a law making simulation.
5. Students will create a metaphor representing the Constitution.
6. Students will read about the conflict over legislative power.
7. Students will fill in a graphic organizer.
8. Students will teach another student.

**References and Credits**

National Constitution Center Class Visit Activities Guide, Annenberg Center for Education and Outreach, Philadelphia, PA,

The Constitution in a New Nation, Teachers' Curriculum Institute; Palo Alto, CA, 1997

We the People, Center for Civic Education, Calabasas, CA 1997

## Day 1 – What are the Powers?

### Opener

Picture representing the 3 branches of government.

Ask students what the picture represents?

Ask student to write down which branch of government they think is most powerful?

Save the answer to go back to later.

### Objective:

1. Students will explore the constitution using a scavenger-style worksheet.
2. Students will identify the duties of the three branches of government.

### Materials:

Scavenger Hunt questions

Answer chart

Copy of the Constitution for each student

### Teacher:

Students have previously viewed the Constitution. Vocabulary words have been introduced and students are familiar with the structure of the Constitution, i.e. articles, sections and clauses. Explain the students will be looking at the first three articles today. Their goal is to discover the powers of the three branches and answer the question – which branch of government is most powerful.

### Activities:

1. Handout copies of questions answer chart and Constitution to each student.
2. Students may work individually or in pairs but each must complete an answer chart.
3. Students read each question and search through the first three articles to find the answers.
4. Record the article, section and clause of each answer.
5. Record the answer as “a power” on the answer chart, see example.

### Follow-up:

Most of this assignment will be completed in class. If not, the students can finish up individually as homework. It is important that students have the correct information on the answer chart. The master chart may be placed on the overhead and student may add, change or delete where necessary or their charts may be collected and master charts may be given out as study guides.

### Assessment:

Answer charts.

## Day 2 – What are Checks and Balances?

### Opener:

- Hand each student a power card as they walk into the room.
- Ask student to place power card under the correct branch of government.  
(Make 3 columns on chalkboard labeled for the 3 branches)
- Ask students if they see any errors.
- Have student come up and move cards around if necessary.
- Continuing moving power cards around until correct.
- Discuss any questions.

### Objective:

1. Review yesterday's assignment.
2. Students will create examples of checks and balances.

### Materials:

- Place each power from yesterday's chart on a card, construction paper etc.
- Tape or magnets to place power cards on board
- Completed answer sheets
- The Power to Check work sheet

### Teacher:

1. Ask students to brainstorm things that have 3 parts.  
Possible answers: stool, tree branches, pizza pieces, bicycles, and triangle
2. Using their examples discuss the consequences of one missing part
  - Would it be whole?
  - Would it work?
  - Is one part more important than another is?
3. Review the fact that our government is divided into 3 parts and they need each other to work.
4. Looking at the chart find an example of where 2 branches of government work together. Can you find another? Another? Another?
5. Is there any place where all three branches work together?
6. Explain and discuss checks and balances.

### Activities:

1. Hand out Checks and Balance worksheet.
2. Students may complete with partners or individually.

### Follow-up:

- Review worksheet to make sure students have correct answers.

### Assessment:

- Student's written examples.

## **Simulation Days 3-7 How Does it Work?**

### **Opener**

Repeat Day 2 opener

### **Objectives:**

1. Student will simulate the 3 branches of government.
2. Students will pass laws for the classroom.

### **Materials:**

Oak tag paper for name plates

Rules of simulation

Forms: Ballot for President and Vice President

Budget

The Senate – Official Document

House of Representatives – Official Document

Office of the President – Official Document

Presidential Agenda

Issue Statements

**Note:** I use color coding for easy identification

### **Teacher:**

This is a 5-day simulation for the classroom. Students will work independently but with careful instructions and guidelines. This unit is structure for multiple classes to challenge each other. For this unit you must have a point system in place. Total number of points determines the winner. Perhaps you work with a reward point system throughout the year, you can do a brief pre-simulation unit in which students have the opportunity to win points or you can simply give points to the classes for the simulation.

### **Day 3**

1. Handout and review rules of simulation.
2. Briefly discuss the qualities a President and Vice President must have before allowing them to nominate candidates to represent their party.
3. Students choose their role from a hat, Senator or Representative. One third of the class number should be Senators.
4. See activities for day 1

### **Day 4**

1. Class is arranged to seat the two Houses of Congress, a small table for committee meetings and a table for the executive branch with room for five.
2. Explain the role of a Party Whip.
3. See activities for day 2

### **Days 5, 6 & 7**

Your role from this point on is to monitor and assist when necessary. Students will need assistance at first. You may guide but students must read the Constitution to determine procedure. If a student ask for verification for a procedure you may affirm their interpretation if correct. If the procedure suggested is wrong simply ask students to check the Constitution. You may want to advise members on strategy. It is an opportunity to discuss partisan and by-partisan actions/relations. Also, you are observing for unconstitutional actions. Points are listed on the board and each day you discuss errors and loss of points. You also must review all laws passed in case they need to go to the Supreme Court for review.

At some point you will simply need to call an end to the simulation. You may simple designate 10-15 minutes at the end of another class to finish up any unfinished business. All goals will not be accomplished and that is pre-determined.

### **Activities:**

#### **Day 3**

1. Class will be divided into two groups, Blue and Green
2. Students will separate into parties and choose a ticket, President and Vice President, one Blue and one Green.
3. Ticket will be pulled from a hat.  
**Note:** I choose not to have the class vote because of popularity issues.
4. Next student will pick their role from a hat, Senator or Representative.
5. Students make “name plates” using their proper titles. Extra points for researching and coming up with a current legislator.

#### **Day 4**

1. Party members meet and select a House and Senate Whip.
2. Whips adjust their nameplates to reflect – Majority and Minority Whip.
3. At the same time the President and Vice President is appointing their Cabinet.  
(**Teacher:** Make sure you advise that Cabinet members need not be from the same political party. If they choose only from their party they will lose votes in the legislature. Also advise the Executive branch they need legislative allies to help promote their agenda)
4. Whips assign Senators and Representatives their responsibilities (goals).

#### **Day 5, 6 & 7**

1. Student will work independently to accomplish tasks required on Goal Sheet.
2. Students must use the proper forms to document their actions.
3. Students will use the master copy and the Constitution to verify they are acting properly.
4. Students lose points anytime their action is determined “unconstitutional.”

#### **Last Day**

Students will take the basketballs shots or roll the dice to determine military victories if any classes declared war. This is the event may help determine the winner of the simulation.

**Follow-up:**

Review their accomplishments

Questions:

What was most difficult?

What were the problems?

Could these problems or difficulties be avoided?

What surprised you the most?

What would you change next time?

What did you learn?

Do you think the three branches is effective?

Refer back to opening question, Day 1, review their answers

What do they think now?

**Note:** Make sure the students' laws are implemented.

**Assessment:**

In pairs students will create a metaphor for the three branches of government. They must create a visual representation of their metaphor detailing how it is like and different from the 3 branches.

## Day 8 – Why was Separation of Powers Created?

**Opener:**

Asked the students why the Framers created the separation of powers?

Discuss responses

**Objectives:**

1. Students will read about the conflict over legislative power
2. Students will fill in a graphic organizer.
3. Students will teach another student.

**Materials:**

Graphic Organizer

Copies of We the People, Chapters 14 and 15

**Teacher:**

Now that students have experienced the workings of separation of power and checks and balances the historical understanding is necessary, also easier for them to understand. Review the reasons we fought the revolution and the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.

**Activities**

1. Divide the class into 2 sections.
2. One group with read chapter 14, the other Chapter 15.
3. Students will fill out their organizers in detail.
4. Students will partner up and teach their organizer to the opposite group.

**Assessment**

Graphic Organizers

Teaching discussion