

Lesson 11: Thinking like a Political Scientist

Big Ideas of the Lesson

- Governments are organizations that set up and enforce laws to protect people and resolve conflicts.
- A federal system is a government system in which powers are divided between the national and state governments.
- The United States government is a representative democracy, or a republic, in which citizens hold political power through elected representatives.
- The United States government has three branches: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch.
- The United States Constitution gives each branch of government the power to check, or limit, the other two branches.
- The rights of United States citizens are granted by the Bill of Rights.

Lesson Abstract:

The lesson begins by asking the students to imagine what life would be like if there were no rules. This discussion reveals why societies have governments and defines government for the students. Students' prior knowledge is accessed by asking them to describe what they know about the United States government. As a result, a definition of democracy is established. Books, such as *We the People* and/or *We the Kids*, are read aloud to the students to remind them that the United States Constitution serves as the framework of our government. A "Preamble Scramble" is used to help the students understand the meaning and purpose of the Preamble of the Constitution. Graphic organizers are used to aid the students' understanding of the three branches of government and the checks and balances system established in the Constitution. The lesson concludes with a review of the first ten amendments to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights. The students design a poster to describe one of the first ten amendments.

Content Expectations

- 6 – C3.6.1: Define the characteristics of a nation-state (a specific territory, clearly defined boundaries, citizens, and jurisdiction over people who reside there, laws, and government), and how Western Hemisphere nations interact. *See also 7 – C3.6.1.*
- 7 – C4.3.1: Explain how governments address national issues and form policies, and how the policies may not be consistent with those of other countries (e.g. population pressures in China compared to Sweden; international immigration quotas, international aid, energy needs for natural gas and oil and military aid).

Key Concepts

civic inquiry
civics