



## **Instructor's Guide**

# **U.S. Government: How It Works**

## **THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH**

### **Introduction**

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This Instructor's Guide provides information to help you get the most out of *The Executive Branch*, part of the six-part series *U.S. Government: How It Works*. The contents of the guide will allow you to prepare your students before using the program and to present follow-up activities to reinforce the program's key learning points.

While the complexities of the American political system have never been greater, the right visual aid can help students sift through them — and even develop a passion for the subject. The six-part series *U.S. Government: How It Works* is an ideal tool for introducing and exploring key aspects of U.S. government and public policy. Using a combination of eye-catching graphics, dynamic video footage, and interviews with legal and political scholars, each episode celebrates a particular dimension of American democracy while equipping students to candidly discuss political issues. The series includes:

- *The Legislative Branch*
- *The Executive Branch*
- *The Judicial Branch*
- *The Constitution and Foundations of Government*
- *Elections and Political Parties*
- *Citizenship and Civic Responsibilities*

### **Program Summary**

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Many equate it with the Presidency, but the Executive branch of our government is far more complex than that. Containing departments and agencies that directly affect the health, safety, security, and prosperity of the American public, the Executive branch is an administrative mountain with the White House at its peak. This program expands on that description, familiarizing students with the most visible arm of U.S. leadership and its evolution through the years. Topics include the President's roles as head of state, head of government, chief executive, and commander-in-chief; his or her

responsibility to fill federal positions; relationships between the Executive branch and the other two branches, including the appointment of judges and the power to veto legislation; and more. Selected presidents, from Washington to Lincoln to Obama, are concisely profiled.

## **Learning Objectives**

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After viewing the program, students will understand:

- The roles and responsibilities of the President
- The roles and responsibilities of the Vice President
- The functioning of the Cabinet
- The system of checks and balances, and separation of powers
- Some highlights of past presidencies, such as James Monroe's "Monroe Doctrine," Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal," and Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" legislation

## **Main Topics**

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### **Section 1: Introduction**

The program begins with a brief look at George Washington and the leadership example he set for future presidents.

### **Section 2: The Executive Branch**

This section familiarizes viewers with the President's roles as head of state, head of government, chief executive, and commander-in-chief. It also includes a discussion of the system of checks and balances, and an overview of the buildings and offices of the White House Complex.

### **Section 3: The Presidency**

Although head of the Executive branch, the President works with the Legislative branch to enact new laws. This section features legislative highlights of several past presidencies, such as Roosevelt's New Deal, Clinton's Brady Bill, Bush's creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and more. It also touches on presidents who left office before serving out their full term.

### **Section 4: The Cabinet**

The U.S. Cabinet — who is a member, and what they do — is the focus of the program's final section. Al Gore, Dick Cheney, and Joe Biden are discussed as examples of the key role the Vice President can play as advisor to the President. Also covered: the presidential line of succession.

## **Fast Facts**

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- In 1973 and 1974, the United States had both a President and a Vice President who had not been elected by the people's vote. In 1973 Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned amid charges of tax evasion and of having accepted bribes while serving as governor of Maryland. Under the terms of the 25th Amendment — ratified only six years earlier — President Nixon nominated House Minority Leader Gerald Ford as his successor. When Nixon resigned a year later, Ford automatically became President. Ford in turn appointed Nelson Rockefeller, former New York governor, as Vice President.
- The first president to be photographed was John Quincy Adams (1825-1829). Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893) was the first to use electricity in the White House. The first president to ride in a car, and to campaign by telephone, was William McKinley (1897-1901). Warren G. Harding (1921-1923) was the first president to speak over the radio. Harry S. Truman (1945-1953) was the first to give a speech on TV. Barack Obama (2009 – present) was the first president to use social networking technologies such as YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, and Facebook to conduct his campaign.
- General George Washington's Continental Army hit a low point at the Valley Forge encampment in the winter of 1777-78. Suffering from starvation, disease, and exposure to severe weather, it seemed unlikely they would be able to overcome British forces to win American independence. But with the retreat of the British from Philadelphia, the patriots' morale improved tremendously. It was around this time that the American people began spontaneously to celebrate Washington's birthday. February 22 became an official national holiday in 1885.
- During the Great Depression nearly 25% of workers were unemployed. Through a series of acts and statutes passed by Congress, President Franklin D. Roosevelt worked to implement banking reform laws and emergency relief programs to help turn the course of the economy. His "New Deal" was meant to provide short-term solutions to help people get back on their feet. Several New Deal programs remain active though, including the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Social Security Administration. President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act aims to revitalize the economy through changes to tax laws, increasing certain Medicaid, unemployment, and nutrition assistance benefits, and by starting programs that both save and create jobs.
- Many presidents have made lasting contributions during their terms that have impacted the daily lives of millions of people. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, which marked the beginning of the end of slavery in America. Lyndon Johnson, who became president following the assassination of John Kennedy, was responsible for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. President Bill Clinton expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit, a subsidy for low-income workers. President George W. Bush initiated the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief program, which was a commitment of \$15 billion to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic worldwide.

- The role of Vice President was once thought to be little more than a minor position. The first Vice President, John Adams, called it “the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived.” But over the years, the duties of Vice President have expanded. Al Gore was an important consultant to President Clinton on issues concerning the environment and foreign policy. During his eight years as Vice President, Dick Cheney was a key advisor in energy and security matters to President George W. Bush. Vice President Joe Biden was chosen by President Obama to spearhead efforts to pass the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Several former vice presidents have been elected president; some of them were elected after completing the term of a deceased president.
- The Cabinet is composed of the heads of many different executive departments. Each of these departments has a unique area of focus, such as energy, education, and defense. The Cabinet’s role is to advise and assist the President in making informed decisions on matters of federal policy. George Washington’s Cabinet consisted of secretaries of War, State, and the Treasury, along with an Attorney General. Today there are 15 different Cabinet departments, the most recent being the Department of Homeland Security, established in response to the September 11 attacks.
- The Constitution states that a president must be a natural born citizen of the United States and have lived in the U.S. for at least 14 years. A “natural born citizen” is generally taken to mean anyone born on U.S. soil, but there are many other legal inclusions, such as circumstances around being born in a U.S. possession. The Constitution does not specify the meaning of “natural born,” and the issue is still up for debate. President Barack Obama was born in Hawaii in 1961, two years after it became a state, making him a natural born citizen and indisputably an American citizen. John McCain, Obama’s opponent in the 2008 presidential election, was born in the Panama Canal Zone (a U.S. territory) to American citizens — this makes McCain a citizen, but whether or not he is a natural born citizen could be argued. The 1964 Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater was born in Arizona when it was still a territory and not yet a state, so his citizenship status was also challenged.

## **Vocabulary Terms**

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**Cabinet:** An advisory body to the president, consisting of the heads of the 15 executive departments of the federal government. Cabinet officers are called “secretaries” (except for the Postmaster General and the Attorney General).

**Capitol:** The building in Washington, D.C., used by the U.S. Congress for its sessions.

**checks and balances:** The powers conferred on each of the three branches of government by which each restrains the others from exerting too much power.

**Commander-in-Chief:** The role of the United States president as highest ranking officer in the armed forces.

**Constitution of the United States:** “The supreme law of the land,” it is the document that embodies the fundamental laws and principles of the United States. Drafted at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and ratified by the required nine states in 1788, the document replaced the Articles of Confederation and went into effect on March 4, 1789. It consists of the preamble, seven articles, and 27 amendments (which were added later). It established a new federal republic, granting certain powers to the national government while reserving other powers to the states.

**executive branch:** The branch of federal and state government responsible for implementing, supporting, and enforcing the laws made by the legislative branch and interpreted by the judicial branch. The executive branch consists of the President, the Vice President, the Cabinet, the federal executive departments (whose secretaries make up the Cabinet), and the Executive Office of the President.

**Executive Office of the President (EOP):** The President’s immediate staff, as well as multiple levels of support staff reporting to the President. The EOP includes such entities as the Council of Economic Advisors, the National Security Council, and the Domestic Policy Council. The EOP is headed by the White House Chief of Staff.

**federal agencies and commissions:** Also called “executive agencies” and “independent agencies,” these are entities whose directors are nominated by the President. The CIA, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Social Security Administration are among the hundreds of federal agencies and commissions.

**federal executive departments:** The primary units of the Executive branch, for example, the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Labor, etc. The heads of the federal executive departments make up the Cabinet.

**judicial branch:** The court systems of local, state, and federal governments, responsible for interpreting the laws passed by the legislative branch and enforced by the executive branch.

**legislative branch:** The branch of federal and state government empowered to make the laws that are then enforced by the executive branch and interpreted by the judicial branch. The legislative branch consists of Congress and the fifty state legislatures.

**New Deal:** A group of government programs and policies established under President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s; the New Deal was designed to improve conditions for persons suffering in the Great Depression. These included banking reform laws, emergency relief programs, and agricultural programs. Several New Deal programs remain active, including the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Federal Housing Administration, and the Social Security Administration.

**Oath of Office:** An affirmation required by the Constitution before a newly-elected President takes office.

**Oval Office:** An oval-shaped room in the White House that serves as the official office of the President.

**Secretary of State:** The head of the United States Department of State, concerned with foreign affairs. The Secretary is a member of the President's Cabinet and is the highest-ranking cabinet secretary both in line of succession and order of precedence.

**Speaker of the House:** The presiding officer of the House of Representatives. The Speaker is second in line, after the vice president, in succession to the presidency. In 2007 Nancy Pelosi became the first female Speaker of the House.

**veto:** The power of a president or governor to reject a bill proposed by a legislature by refusing to sign it into law.

**West Wing:** Part of the White House Complex, it is the building housing the official offices of the President.

**White House Chief of Staff:** The head of the Executive Office of the President and senior aide to the President.

**White House Complex:** The four principal structures and the adjoining outdoor ceremonial areas which serve as the seat of the executive branch of government. The structures are the Executive Residence (where the First Family lives); the Eisenhower Executive Office Building (houses the executive offices of the President and Vice President); the West Wing (the location of the Oval Office, Cabinet Room, and Roosevelt Room); and the East Wing (houses the office of the First Lady, White House Social Secretary, and provides public access to the State Rooms of the Executive Residence for tours and social events).

## **Pre-Program Discussion Questions**

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1. What are some of the powers of the Executive branch?
2. What do you think makes for a great president?
3. Originally, the Vice President was not a running mate chosen by the presidential candidate, he was the presidential candidate who had received the second-largest number of electoral votes. Do you think this was a good way to elect a vice president? Why or why not?
4. Who is the current Secretary of State? Speaker of the House? Secretary of Defense?
5. Who would take over if both the President and the Vice President left office before their terms had expired?

## **Post-Program Discussion Questions**

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1. What are some of the President's responsibilities?
2. The film states that the President needs to be able to "mobilize public opinion on behalf of his political agenda." What do you think this means?
3. What is the Monroe Doctrine? The New Deal? Can you name some legislative highlights of other presidencies?
4. What are the responsibilities of the Vice President?
5. How many of the 15 different executive departments (e.g., Department of Agriculture, Department of the Interior, etc.) can you name?

## **Student Projects**

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- Make a chart or other visual representation of the Executive branch of government. Include blocks for the President, Vice President, Cabinet and federal executive departments, and the Executive Office of the President (key positions and entities). Your chart should also list some federal agencies and commissions (e.g., the CIA, the EPA, the FCC, the FDIC, NASA, etc.). Fill in the chart with the names of key people holding executive positions.
- Learn more about the 15 executive departments and how they impact the lives of Americans. (For instance, in 2009 the Federal Aviation Commission [Department of Transportation] expanded public access to information about flight delays. The Department of Homeland Security launched "Virtual USA," an information-sharing initiative that helps first responders communicate with each other during emergencies.) First, compile some basic information. Who heads this department? What is its mission? When was it created? Then, visit the department's Web site to read recent news articles or press releases about it. Students should



work together in small groups, so that all 15 departments are represented, and then take turns presenting their department's information to the class.

- Use the Internet or library to find the answers to the following questions. Then, quiz your classmates on their presidential knowledge.
  - Can a sitting president be convicted of a crime or sued in civil court?
  - Was George Washington really the first president?
  - Is there any circumstance where a two-term president could be president again?
  - How old must a vice president be?
  - Can the President and Vice President be from different parties?
  - Does the vice president have the same qualifications as the president?
  - Can federal elected officials be recalled?
  - What is an Executive Order, and can one be unconstitutional?
  - What are the requirements to be a member of the Cabinet?
  - Which is more powerful, the Congress or the President?
- Visit [www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov) to see how and where Recovery Act funds are being allocated in your state, and specifically in your zip code. Who are the prime recipients of the funds, and how much funding did they receive? How many jobs have been created or saved in your state as a result of the funds? Report on your findings in the form of an article for your school or local newspaper.



## **Assessment Questions**

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- 1. The executive branch consists of \_\_\_\_\_. (Choose all that apply)**
  - a) the President
  - b) the Vice President
  - c) the heads of the Legislative Assembly
  - d) Senators
  - e) the Cabinet
  - f) the Supreme Court justices
  - g) the heads of independent agencies
  
- 2. The executive branch is responsible for \_\_\_\_\_.** 
  - a) making laws
  - b) interpreting laws
  - c) enforcing laws
  - d) determining if laws are constitutional
  
- 3. True or False? Some of the President's duties include appointing Cabinet members, federal judges, and government officers.**
  
- 4. The President's role as Commander-in-Chief means \_\_\_\_\_. (Choose all that apply)**
  - a) his word is "the supreme law of the land"
  - b) he has the ability to override all vetoes of Congress
  - c) he is the "Leader of the Free World"
  - d) he is responsible for commanding the five branches of the Armed Forces
  - e) he has the authority to declare war
  
- 5. Every President elected has a "legislative agenda," which is \_\_\_\_\_.** 
  - a) a list of items that they hope to get enacted into law
  - b) a covert plan to pass laws that will benefit their supporters
  - c) a list of expired bills they hope to clear from the record
  - d) a series of acts and statutes passed by Congress
  
- 6. Which of the following is NOT an example of checks and balances?**
  - a) The President can veto a law passed by Congress
  - b) Congress can override a Presidential veto with a two-thirds vote from both Houses
  - c) The Supreme Court can declare a law unconstitutional
  - d) Executive Cabinet members are appointed by a two-thirds vote from both Houses
  - e) The President appoints Supreme Court justices, but Congress must approve the appointments
  - g) The fact that we have three branches of government — executive, judicial, and legislative

- 7. The Vice President of the United States \_\_\_\_\_. (Choose all that apply)**
- a) is considered to be a “Cabinet-level” position
  - b) also serves as the President of the Senate
  - c) is also the Chairman of the Board of NASA
  - d) serves as trusted advisor to their President
- 8. The Cabinet is composed of \_\_\_\_\_.**
- a) one representative from each of the fifty states
  - b) the heads of the executive departments such as the Department of Labor, etc.
  - c) special political appointees who are able to serve as legal advisors to the President
  - d) the Vice President, the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, and the Secretary of State
- 9. The main responsibility of the Secretary of State is \_\_\_\_\_.**
- a) the overall safety and well-being of citizens on American soil
  - b) serving as “Attorney General” for the U.S.
  - c) the conduct of U.S. foreign policy
  - d) heading up the Cabinet
- 10. If both the President and the Vice President can no longer serve, who becomes President?**
- a) The Speaker of the House
  - b) The President Pro Tempore of the Senate
  - c) The Secretary of State
  - d) The White House Chief of Staff

## **Assessment Questions Answer Key**

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**1. The executive branch consists of \_\_\_\_\_. (Choose all that apply)**

- a) the President
- b) the Vice President
- c) the heads of the Legislative Assembly
- d) Senators
- e) the Cabinet
- f) the Supreme Court justices
- g) the heads of independent agencies

*A: (a) the President; (b) the Vice President; (e) the Cabinet; (g) the heads of independent agencies*

**2. The executive branch is responsible for \_\_\_\_\_.**

- a) making laws
- b) interpreting laws
- c) enforcing laws
- d) determining if laws are constitutional

*A: (c) enforcing laws*

**3. True or False? Some of the President's duties include appointing Cabinet members, federal judges, and government officers.**

*A: True*

**4. The President's role as Commander-in-Chief means \_\_\_\_\_. (Choose all that apply)**

- a) his word is "the supreme law of the land"
- b) he has the ability to override all vetoes of Congress
- c) he is the "Leader of the Free World"
- d) he is responsible for commanding the five branches of the Armed Forces
- e) he has the authority to declare war

*A: (d) he is responsible for commanding the five branches of the Armed Forces*

**5. Every President elected has a "legislative agenda," which is \_\_\_\_\_.**

- a) a list of items that they hope to get enacted into law
- b) a covert plan to pass laws that will benefit their supporters
- c) a list of expired bills they hope to clear from the record
- d) a series of acts and statutes passed by Congress

*A: (a) a list of items that they hope to get enacted into law*

**6. Which of the following is NOT an example of checks and balances?**

- a) The President can veto a law passed by Congress
- b) Congress can override a Presidential veto with a two-thirds vote from both Houses
- c) The Supreme Court can declare a law unconstitutional
- d) Executive Cabinet members are appointed by a two-thirds vote from both Houses
- e) The President appoints Supreme Court justices, but Congress must approve the appointments
- g) The fact that we have three branches of government — executive, judicial, and legislative

*A: (d) Executive Cabinet members are appointed by a two-thirds vote from both Houses*

**7. The Vice President of the United States \_\_\_\_\_. (Choose all that apply)**

- a) is considered to be a “Cabinet-level” position
- b) also serves as the President of the Senate
- c) is also the Chairman of the Board of NASA
- d) serves as trusted advisor to their President

*A: All of these are true.*

**8. The Cabinet is composed of \_\_\_\_\_.**

- a) one representative from each of the fifty states
- b) the heads of the executive departments such as the Department of Labor, etc.
- c) special political appointees who are able to serve as legal advisors to the President
- d) the Vice President, the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, and the Secretary of State

*A: (b) the heads of the executive departments such as the Department of Labor, etc.*

**9. The main responsibility of the Secretary of State is \_\_\_\_\_.**

- a) the overall safety and well-being of citizens on American soil
- b) serving as “Attorney General” for the U.S.
- c) the conduct of U.S. foreign policy
- d) heading up the Cabinet

*A: (c) the conduct of U.S. foreign policy*

**10. If both the President and the Vice President can no longer serve, who becomes President?**

- a) The Speaker of the House
- b) The President Pro Tempore of the Senate
- c) The Secretary of State
- d) The White House Chief of Staff

*A: (a) The Speaker of the House*

## **Additional Resources**

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### **The White House**

[www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

### **The U.S. Constitution Online**

[www.usconstitution.net](http://www.usconstitution.net)

### **Government Resources**

*THOMAS (The Library of Congress)*

<http://thomas.loc.gov/links>

### **The National Archives**

*America's Historical Documents*

[www.archives.gov/historical-docs](http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs)

### **The White House Historical Association**

[www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org)

### **Speaker Nancy Pelosi**

[www.speaker.gov](http://www.speaker.gov)

### **GovSpot**

*US government, state government, & more*

[www.govspot.com](http://www.govspot.com)

### **Recovery.gov**

*Track the Money*

[www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov)

### **PolitiFact**

*Sorting out the truth in government*

[www.politifact.com](http://www.politifact.com)

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### **Made in Chicago: The Making of Barack Obama (DVD/VHS)**

It was in Chicago, Barack Obama's adopted hometown, that the 24-year-old future President of the United States began a personal and political odyssey that would take him all the way to the White House. In this program, many of the people who have known Obama best since his arrival in Chicago offer their insights. Obama's work as a community organizer, his achievements at Harvard Law School, the writing of *Dreams from My Father*, his brief stints as a law professor at The University of Chicago and as a civil rights lawyer, and his meteoric political career are all discussed. The program ends with Obama's victory in the 2008 primaries and his speech on the issue of race in the wake of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright's controversial "God Damn America" sermon. Additional portions of Obama oratory are included throughout. Not available in French-speaking Canada. (51 minutes) © 2008 (# 40157)

### **Dreams of Obama (Streaming Digital On Demand)**

Produced on the eve of Barack Obama's historic presidential inauguration, this *Frontline* episode tells the story of how a little-known state senator rose from obscurity to the White House in just over four years. The program draws on interviews with those closest to Obama to provide insight into his ideas, background, and leadership style. A personal and political biography, the film examines the key moments that shaped our 44th President and asks what his election says about 21st-century America. Distributed by PBS Distribution. (60 minutes) © 2009 (# 40891)

### **Cheney's Law (Streaming Digital On Demand)**

In the view of some political observers, Vice President Dick Cheney spent his career waging a secretive battle to expand the power of the presidency. This episode of *Frontline* examines behind-closed-doors ideological divisions within the second Bush administration over the power of the executive branch and the rule of law. Viewers are introduced to several controversies at the heart of Cheney's tenure, including the use of domestic wiretapping, the firing of U.S. attorneys, the uncertain validity of asserting executive privilege, and other issues that put the administration at loggerheads with Congress. Distributed by PBS Distribution. (60 minutes) © 2007 (# 40886)

### **Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Tour (DVD/VHS)**

In this classic program, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, just 32 years old, gives a guided tour of the newly redecorated White House. Jointly produced and broadcast by NBC and CBS, this program aired on Valentine's Day, 1962. One of the most popular newscasts in all of television history! President John F. Kennedy makes a brief appearance. Not available in French-speaking Canada. (58 minutes) © 2007 (# 39060)

***Meet the Press Meets the Presidents* (DVD/VHS)**

No easy questions and no simple answers — that's *Meet the Press*, the longest-running network television program in history. This 13-part series of unrehearsed news conferences shines the uncompromising light of inquiry on the highest office in the land as future Presidents, former Presidents, and even sitting Presidents get grilled. Not available in French-speaking Canada. The series includes *John F. Kennedy: December 2, 1951* | *Richard M. Nixon: September 14, 1952* | *Herbert Hoover: December 11, 1955* | *John F. Kennedy: January 3, 1960* | *Lyndon B. Johnson: October 9, 1960* | *Ronald Reagan: January 9, 1966* | *Gerald R. Ford: November 9, 1975* | *George H. W. Bush: February 22, 1976* | *Ronald Reagan: March 7, 1976* | *Jimmy Carter: January 20, 1980* | *Richard M. Nixon: April 10, 1988* | *Bill Clinton: November 9, 1997* | *George W. Bush: November 21, 1999*. (13-part series, 25-52 minutes each) © 2007 (# 39069)

***Moyers: Report from Philadelphia Video Clip Collection—Themes* (DVD/VHS)**

Filmed at Independence Hall and filled with historical images and passages from the diaries, letters, and records of the Framers themselves, this two-part set is an indispensable tool for teaching the Constitution. All 76 clips (2:35 each) are arranged into groupings that take a thematic approach to the doings and decisions of the momentous Constitutional Convention of 1787. A viewable/printable instructor's guide is available online. (2-part set, 104 minutes each) © 2007 (# 39942)

***Branches of Government* (DVD/VHS)**

This series describes the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Branches of American government and how they interact in a system of checks and balances. A Cambridge Educational Production. The series includes *The Executive Branch of Government: A Study of Federal and State Government* | *How a Bill Becomes a Law* | *The Judicial Branch of Government* (3-part series, 29-35 minutes each) © 1993-1995 (# 14442)