

- Obtain a copy of the local school district budget for use by the class. With students working in three groups, each dealing with a different level of government, have the class determine the amounts of school funds derived from local, state and federal government. Have each group prepare a report on how the school district uses the funds from each level of government and ask them to respond to hypothetical situations in which funds from their level of government were either raised by 20% or lowered by the same amount. Then have the groups compare their decisions and discuss how federalism affects their school.
- Invite a local government official to class, such as a representative of a mayoral office, a member of city council, a police official, a city manager or his or her representative. Prior to the visit, divide the class into groups and have each group do research using the Internet on the office represented by the visitor. Have each group prepare several questions for the visiting official, keeping in mind how levels of government interact and are mutually dependent for their successful operation in many governmental arenas.
- Students can create a Venn diagram that compares state and federal governments.
- With students, create a chart that has at its head Federal, State and Both, and list different responsibilities, such as military, post office, taxing power, schools, medical facilities, etc. After research, students can put a check mark on the chart to indicate whether a particular responsibility falls under the purview of the federal government, state or local government, or is a shared responsibility.
- Encourage students to compare your state constitution with the U.S. Constitution. How are they similar and different? Why do students think these similarities and differences are important, considering what they know about federalism?
- Students can compare a federal system with other systems of government, such as unitary and confederal systems. After researching these three systems, students can make visual representations that compare the three kinds. Students can also select one of these systems and write a proposal that addresses the advantages and disadvantages of that system. After reviewing these proposals, the class can vote on which system they prefer, and why.
- Your class can outline how your state and local government are organized. This description should address the following issues: the functioning of each of the three branches, who the public officials are, which positions are elected or appointed, what the state legislature is called and how large the state legislature is.

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our Web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.closeup.org/federal.htm
The Close Up Foundation maintains a Web site for students that includes historical documents about federalism, a federalism time line and a teaching activity about the topic.
- bensguide.gpo.gov
“Ben’s Guide to U.S. Government for Kids” is a wonderful site with grade-specific material (from kindergarten through 12th grade) on the character and history of American government. The segment on “National vs. State Government” is especially helpful for learning about federalism.
- www.csg.org
The Council of State Governments hosts this Web site, which offers a great deal of information about American government at the state level. Links to individual state government pages are also provided.

Suggested Print Resources

- Bjornlund, Lydia. *The U.S. Constitution: Blueprint for Democracy*. Lucent Books, San Diego, CA; 1999.
- Cleveland, Will and Mark Alvarez. *Yo Sacramento! And All Those Other Capitals You Don't Know*. Millbrook Press, Brookfield, CT; 1997.
- Remy, Richard C., ed. *American Government at Work*. Danbury, CT, Grolier Educational; 2001.

TEACHER'S GUIDE CONSULTANT

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THE U.S. FEDERAL SYSTEM

Grades 5–12

This guide is a supplement designed for teachers to use when presenting programs in the video series *United States Government*.

Before Viewing: Give students an introduction to the topic by relaying aspects of the program overview to them. Select pre-viewing discussion questions and vocabulary to provide a focus for students when they view the program.

After Viewing: Review the program and vocabulary, and use the follow-up questions and activities to inspire continued discussion. Encourage students to research the topic further with the Internet and print resources provided.



Program Overview

Government in the United States is not under the control of a single national government. Rather, it has two levels — a national and a state level. This system of multiple cooperating levels of government is called federalism.

In America, the structure of the two levels of government is similar. Although each government has a constitution, state constitutions cannot contradict the federal one. Both levels of government have legislative, executive and judicial branches. A state legislature makes laws just like the U.S. Congress does, but congressional legislation affects the whole nation, while state laws only affect people in that state. Governors are the chief executives of state governments, with duties analogous to those of the U.S. President. Similarly, each state, like the federal government, has a system of courts with a highest, or Supreme Court. In all questions regarding the U.S. Constitution, however, the federal version is paramount.

Although each level of government has its own sphere of responsibility, sometimes there is overlap, causing potential conflicts and questions about state and local power versus federal power. States have responsibility for local matters, while the federal government has powers to deal with foreign policy and regulation of the economy. Knowing their own problems and needs, states can provide local solutions to local problems, and the federal government can provide national solutions to national problems. Over the years, however, the power of the federal government has increased. This is made possible by the “elastic clause” of the U.S. Constitution, which says that Congress has the right to make any laws necessary and proper to carry out its constitutionally provided powers.

Vocabulary

federal government — Legislative, executive and judicial branches of the central government in the U.S. federal system.

state government — Legislative, executive and judicial branches of the state components of the U.S. federal system. There is a state government for each of the 50 states.

federalism — A system of government that divides powers between a central government and two or more local governments.

elastic clause — Article 1, Section 8, Clause 18 of the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the right to make any laws necessary and proper to carry out its constitutional powers.

Tenth Amendment — The last item in the Bill of Rights reserving to the states or the people all powers not delegated to the federal government or prohibited by it to the states.

legislative branch — The branch of American government that makes the law.

executive branch — The branch of American government that carries out, or executes, the law.

judicial branch — The branch of American government that interprets and applies the law.

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governor — The chief executive of a state government.

impeachment — A formal charge brought against a public official by the House of Representatives. The official is then tried in the Senate, and if convicted, removed from office.

veto — The power of Presidents and governors to reject laws proposed by legislatures.

federal court system — Courts established to hear cases involving laws of the national government. Federal courts have judges appointed by the President and approved by the U.S. Senate.

state court systems — Courts established by each state to hear cases involving state law.

U.S. and state Supreme Courts — Highest courts of state and federal court systems. The U.S. Supreme Court is the highest court in the land.

local government — Authorities of cities, counties, towns and other governing areas, whose powers are granted by state government.

city council — The elective legislative body for city governments. A council's powers vary according to the kind of city government in existence.

mayor — The chief executive of city governments. A mayor's powers vary according to the kind of city government in existence.

mandate — A requirement made by a governing authority, such as the federal government, that is legally allowed to require other authorities to perform certain acts.

conditions of aid — Requirements of a governing authority, such as the federal government, if funding is provided.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Many early Americans thought it was dangerous to give a great deal of power to a central government, mainly because it reminded them of the powers that Great Britain had over the colonies. Do students see any dangers in the powers of the federal government? Students should justify their answers.
- The U.S. federal system is comprised of federal and state governments. Students can share what they know about the responsibilities of each of these levels and the relationship between them. Encourage students to speculate about what benefits and problems are created by this relationship.
- The United States is a geographically large country. Students can speculate about how a federal system of government might enhance democracy in such a large country.

Focus Questions

1. What are the main levels of American government?
2. What is the system called in which there is one central and two or more local governments?
3. What is the difference between the terms “federal” and “federalism”?
4. What was the system of American government under the Articles of Confederation, and why was it changed?

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5. In what ways do the responsibilities of state and federal government overlap?
6. What are the main powers of the federal government in this system?
7. What is the elastic clause of the U.S. Constitution, and why is it so named?
8. What is the 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution? Why is it important?
9. In what ways are state governments similar to the federal government?
10. What are some benefits to the nation of having a federal system?
11. How are state legislatures similar and different from each other?
12. What are the powers of state governors?
13. What are the powers and functions of local government?
14. How is local government organized?
15. What is a federal mandate?

Follow-up Discussion

- Discuss whether the federal government has too much, too little or about the right amount of power over states and individuals. Why do students think it might be dangerous for the federal government to have too much or too little power?
- Ask the class in what ways, if any, the federal system should be reformed. Do they think that it could be meaningfully reformed without a constitutional amendment? If so, how?
- Ask the students if they find the “elastic clause” of the U.S. Constitution (Article 1, Section 8, Clause 18) in any way problematic. Is the enormous power available to the Congress based upon this clause dangerous? Would it be dangerous not to have such a clause in the U.S. Constitution?

Follow-up Activities

- Divide the class into two parts, with some members representing the states and the others members of Congress. Have the class conduct a mock congressional hearing in which state representatives testify before Congress. Students as state representatives can use basic principles of American democracy, including those found in the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, to argue that the federal government should give up some of its powers to the states. Students as members of Congress, also using these principles, can question the state representatives and agree or disagree with them. After the hearing, hold a debriefing session with the class.
- Visit a local government office or facility. Before going, do research on the Internet or other sources to determine the relations of the office or facility with state and federal government. Upon reaching the office or facility, question officials about its relations with both levels of government and how this relationship affects them. Have students learn how the place being visited affects the lives of the community. After returning, encourage students to discuss what they've learned.

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