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# Introduction

## About This Book

The activities provided in this booklet are created to enrich government classes. They provide hands-on activities and lessons that engage students in exploring the branches of government that are covered in all government curriculums.

This volume introduces the basic concepts of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government. These activities clarify the terms, concepts, and procedures that students learn about through class lectures and readings.

These government activities were created during the development of a reformatted government course at the high school level. The suggestions provided in textbooks and other supplemental material did not offer complete hands-on approaches sought by the course instructor. As the class was to be taught in a school utilizing block scheduling (ninety and seventy-five minute classes), lessons that kept students active and interested while demonstrating the key components of government were developed. The classroom lessons and materials were used and refined over a two-year period during which six sections of the new government course were taught.

The essential goals for each activity were to make them easy to use, to involve and engage the students, and to clarify key government concepts.

The topics covered in this booklet, and other *Government Activities* volumes, parallel general government textbooks and should be used as a supplemental aid. The activities and demonstrations clarify basic government concepts and allow students to work with material in ways that interest them.

All lessons were created with the teacher and student in mind. The purpose for each lesson is clearly stated and a specific list of materials required for each lesson is provided. Procedures are written in a step-by-step format to allow for easy implementation into a block or typical schedule format. Hints or tips are offered throughout the booklet to assist teachers in adapting lessons to fit their needs or the ability level of students. The Glossary, which concludes each booklet, defines government terms used throughout the lessons. Student handouts include all necessary instructions and directions as well as material to assist in grading. Finally, the material is organized in such a way that incorporating the lessons into an existing curriculum is easy and enjoyable.

Current research indicates that students who are actively engaged in the learning process retain information better than those who are passive participants in the

classroom. *Government Activities* was created with this concept in mind. The hands on approach to Government that this booklet offers will spark and maintain student interest. Being involved in the lessons allows students to become an active part of their own learning. Participation in these activities also provides students with an episodic memory of a classroom experience, strengthening the concepts being taught and therefore improving learning. Most importantly, when students are actively engaged, they have more fun. These activities make the study of government an enjoyable experience for everyone!

## **About the Author**

Kathleen M. Glusick graduated from the University of Wisconsin – Madison with a Bachelor’s degree in Broad Field Social Studies and a minor in Psychology. She completed her Master’s of Education through Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She taught World Cultures, Citizenship, Sociology, Experimental Psychology, and Government during her high school teaching career. After completing her thesis, *The Impact of Brain-Compatible Physical Structures on Classroom Learning*, Peanut Publishing was created to enhance involvement in the classroom by providing teachers with student centered activities.

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## LESSON 2: STATE ISSUES

### **PURPOSE:**

- Demonstrate the diversity of state demographics
- Illustrate the difficulty in meeting all the needs of U.S. citizens

### **MATERIALS:**

- Copies of “Student Handout: State Demographics,” page 8
- Copies of “Student Handout: Representative Vote Sheet,” page 9

### **PROCEDURE:**

- Explain to students that they are going to become a state representative and cast their vote on several policies being considered in the House of Representatives.
- Break students into eight groups with the following number of people in each group (Representative numbers are based on state population. Adjust the numbers to fit your class size. Be sure to keep some states with few representatives and some with many representatives.):
 

State 1: 2 people	State 5: 4 people
State 2: 2 people	State 6: 5 people
State 3: 3 people	State 7: 5 people
State 4: 3 people	State 8: 6 people
- Distribute student handout, “State Demographics,” (p. 8) and have students meet in their group to review the data about their constituents and state.
- Distribute student handout, “Representative Vote Sheet,” (p. 9) but instruct students not to cast their vote at this time.
- Students should discuss the issues with their other state representatives and determine which vote would be best for their constituents.
- After appropriate discussion time, take a verbal vote on each of the issues. After all representatives of a state have voted, allow them to explain, as a state, why they voted the way they did.
- Students should now have a period of time (5-10 minutes) to walk around the room and discuss the issues with other states’ representatives. If there are issues that their state lost on, they should attempt to convince others to change their vote to align with their state. (They should lobby for votes.)
- Students can then cast their paper ballot (or a verbal count could be taken again) to reflect any changed opinions. The tallied votes should be announced to the class.
- Proceed to Discussion questions (p. 7).

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- Did having the demographic information help determine how to vote on the issues?
- What information was helpful for each issue?
- Did your other state representative(s) usually agree on which way to vote? If no, what were some of the problems you ran into?
- Did you personally want to vote differently than what your constituents would have probably wanted on some issues? What do you think representatives do in cases like this?
- Is it fair that state population determines the number of representatives and that some states have fewer representatives than others?
- How did the small states feel in the voting process?
- How did the large states feel in the voting process?
- What techniques did you use to try to convince others to align with your vote?
- What techniques did others use on you?
- What techniques worked?
- What techniques didn't work?
- Why did some people change their mind?
- Would you have voted differently if your vote was to be kept secret?
- Why are representative voting records open to the public?

STUDENT HANDOUT: STATE DEMOGRAPHICS								
	State #1	State #2	State #3	State #4	State #5	State #6	State #7	State #8
Population	3,500,000	4,200,300	6,320,030	6,900,300	8,300,201	10,300,020	11,202,033	13,600,500
Unemployment rate	2%	1.5%	0.4%	4.5%	.34%	3.8%	8.3%	5.1%
% on Social Security	9%	5%	6%	10%	4%	4%	3%	9%
Number of parks in 5 mi. radius	3	7	9	11	10	2	2	3
Average property tax	\$1,030	\$2,040	\$2,145	\$5,300	\$4,565	\$6,200	\$3,202	\$2,687
% practicing a religion	93%	78%	85%	98%	96%	92%	68%	81%
# violent crime/100,000	700	200	670	4,600	400	589	9,898	706

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## STUDENT HANDOUT: REPRESENTATIVE VOTE SHEET

**Directions:** You are to discuss your state data within your group and determine how your constituents would want you to vote on these issues. If you write on your sheet, use pencil, because you may be changing your vote later on.

**ISSUE #1:** Increasing benefits for seniors.

This may please seniors, but it also means taking money away from other programs such as homeless day shelters, work training programs, early childhood education and day care.

YES

NO

**ISSUE #2:** Raising minimum wage.

This may force some businesses to close or layoff workers if they cannot afford paying higher salaries. However, this would please the average worker and possibly pump more money into the economy as people would have more to spend.

YES

NO

**ISSUE #3:** Prohibit the death penalty in all states.

Constituents have widely differing opinions on this topic. Young, old, crime victims, non-crime victims, religious, non-religious, poor and wealthy all feel strongly about this life or death issue.

YES

NO

**ISSUE #4:** Raising property tax to fund social service programs.

Social service programs include youth recreation programs, child welfare services, homeless and food pantry aid.

YES

NO

**ISSUE #5:** Insecticide spraying at local parks.

Many communities have complained about the insect problem making some parks not useable. There are environmental concerns about the health impact of these sprays, especially for the elderly, young children, and pregnant women.

YES

NO