

LESSON PLAN

The three branches of the US government

Social Studies · Grade 4 · 45 min · Term 3, Week 1

CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

Grade 4 Social Studies. Aligned to the C3 Framework Inquiry Arc (D2.Civ.3.3–5): Explain the functions and responsibilities of each branch of the US federal government.

[Common Core State Standards](#) ↗

LEARNING INTENTION

Identify and explain the three branches of the US federal government and their roles

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- I can name the three branches of the US federal government.
- I can describe the main job of each branch.
- I can match each branch to its home building in Washington, D.C.
- I can explain why power is shared across three branches.

Lesson Structure

HOOK

- Photo: the US Capitol, the White House, the Supreme Court.
- What do these three buildings have in common?
- One country, three power centers. Why not just one?

TEACHING

- Three branches: Legislative, Executive, Judicial.
- Legislative branch: Congress makes the laws.
- Executive branch: the President carries out laws.
- Judicial branch: the Supreme Court decides if laws are fair.
- I notice no single branch holds all the power. I wonder why.

PRACTICE

- Branch sort: match job cards to the correct branch label.
- Thumb check: Legislative, Executive, or Judicial?
- Which branch would handle an unfair law? Why?

CLOSURE

- Name all three branches. Share with a partner.
- Which branch makes laws? Which checks them?
- One sentence: why do we share power across branches?

Differentiated Groups

EMERGING

TASK

- Match branch name cards to job description cards.
- Glue each pair onto the correct building picture.
- Use the word bank to label each branch.

MATERIALS

Branch name cards (3 per student: Legislative, Executive, Judicial), job description cards (3 per student), building picture sheet (Capitol, White House, Supreme Court), word bank strip (1 per student), glue sticks (1 per student), pencils

TEACHER ROLE

- Open with group: read each job card aloud together.
- Prompt: Which building did we see in the photo?
- Check matches before students glue.

DEVELOPING

TASK

- Complete the three-branch graphic organizer independently.
- Write the main job of each branch in your own words.
- Answer: why do we share power across three branches?

MATERIALS

Three-branch graphic organizer (1 per student), branch word wall reference card (1 per student), pencils

TEACHER ROLE

- Check in briefly at the start. Clarify the task.
- Return at 10 minutes. Prompt the power-sharing question.

EXTENDING

TASK

- Create a short comic or diagram showing all three branches.
- Include each branch's job and its home building.
- Add a caption explaining why no branch holds all power.

MATERIALS

Blank comic template (1 per student), colored pencils (1 set per student), Washington D.C. buildings reference card (1 per student), pencils

TEACHER ROLE

- Set the task. Confirm students work independently.
- Check caption writing at 12 minutes. Push for specifics.

ASSESSMENT NOTES

- Criterion 1: Can students name all three branches without cards?
- Criterion 2: Listen for job descriptions beyond one-word answers.
- Criterion 3: Check building labels are correctly matched on work.
- Criterion 4: Look for power-sharing reasoning beyond "it's fair."

RELIEF TEACHER NOTES

- All materials are pre-sorted by group into labeled trays.
- Emerging group needs most support. Sit with them first.
- Branch word wall reference cards are in each group tray.
- The branch sort from whole-class practice is still on display.