

Learning Objectives

- 1) Know the characteristics of the three types of governments (country, state, and community) and realize that they have the same basic three-branch plan.
- a) **Country (federal) government:** The leaders of the federal government meet in Washington, D.C., because it is the capital of the United States. Over 200 years ago, the leaders of the United States created a set of laws and plans for the government called the Constitution. The Constitution divided the federal government into three branches: the Legislative, the Executive, and the Judicial. The legislative branch consists of the Congress; it makes the laws that the entire country must follow, and it meets in the capitol building. There are two lawmaking groups in the Congress: The House of Representatives and the Senate. The number of people a state can send to the House of Representatives is based on its population. However, each state has two senators. Though senators and representatives have slightly different jobs, they all get to vote on laws. The executive branch, which is made up of the President, the Vice President, and government agencies, sees that the country's laws are obeyed. Before a bill passed by the Congress becomes a law, the president must sign it. In addition, presidents have many other responsibilities: They inform congress about the state of the country and the new laws that need to be passed; they are in charge of the military; and they visit other countries meet their leaders and make agreements and friendships. The president lives in the Whitehouse. The judicial branch is headed by the Supreme Court, which decides whether laws made by the Congress and signed by the president follow the Constitution. There are nine judges, or justices, on the Supreme Court. Unlike other government leaders, Supreme Court justices are not elected by the people; they are selected by the president. However, the senate must confirm the president's selection. Justices meet in the Supreme Court building and remain on the court until they quit or die.
- b) **State governments:** There are fifty states in the United States of America. They have different climates and resources, so it is necessary for each state to have their own governments to solve problems and make laws for the people who live in the state. State governments have many jobs; they include funding schools, building state colleges and universities, maintaining state parks, and building and fixing state highways. Every state has a special city where the leaders in the state government meet; it is called the state capital. State governments have three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. The legislative branch consists of the state Senate and House of Representatives (sometimes called the

Assembly or House of Delegates); they write laws for the state and vote on them. The Governor is the head of the executive branch, and is the most important leader in the state's government. The governor tells lawmakers what laws should be made. Judges are part of the Judicial branch; they make sure that state laws are fair, and they protect people's property by holding trials to decide the guilt or innocence of those accused of stealing and/or hurting someone else's property.

- c) **Community (local) government:** Local government takes care of problems that happen within that community. It is in charge of the police and firefighters. In addition, the local government collects the trash, helps to provide water and electricity, and builds roads, hospitals, schools, libraries, and parks. Communities also have a three-branched government: City council, mayor, and courts. The town or city council is the lawmaking branch of the local government. They talk about problems that occur within the community and pass laws to fix them. The mayor is part of the executive branch; he/she meets with the city council to discuss new laws. In addition, the mayor sees that community laws are obeyed. In community courts (the judicial branch), judges hold trials for those accused of breaking community laws.
- 2) Know that funds used to pay for the services the governments provide are derived through the taxation of the citizens. The federal government taxes everyone in the country. A state government taxes only those people who are in that particular state. A local government only taxes those people who are in that particular community.
- 3) Understand that government leaders are elected by the people. The person with the most votes wins the election. It is very important that the citizens vote for those people they want to lead the country, state, and/or federal government.
- 4) Realize that citizens are responsible for following laws and paying taxes. Doing those things helps to make the country/state/community a better place in which to live.

Suggested Activities

- 1) **Three branches tree:** Give each student three pieces of white paper and some markers or crayons. Have the students draw a tree with three branches (similar to the diagram in the video) on it on each sheet of paper. If the students are unable to copy the diagram on the video, the teacher can draw it and make copies for the students. Students should label the first diagram "Federal Government", the second diagram "State Government", and the third diagram "Community Government". The

students should then label each branch on each of the three diagrams. Under each branch the students should draw pictures that show the responsibilities of that particular branch. Reference the video and the "Learning Objectives" portion of the teacher's guide if there are question about the responsibilities of the different branches.

- 2) **Mini play:** Break the class up into three groups with each group representing a different type of government (federal, state, and community). Then break each group into three subgroups with each subgroup representing one of the branches of that type of government. Have each subgroup put together a short (1-2 minute) play that describes what that branch does to the rest of the class.
- 3) **Field trip:** Visit a capitol building or city hall. This is an excellent opportunity for students to see part of their government in action.

Vocabulary

City Hall – A building where the city council and mayor meet to make laws for the community

Community – A group of people who live close to each other – A town is a small community and a city is a large community

Court – A place where problems with laws are discussed and trials are held

Leaders – The people who are in charge of solving problems and making laws

Service – A job that is performed to help people (police officers, firefighters, trash collectors, etc.)

Tax – Money that people pay to support the government

