

**“The Three Branches of Government are like a...”**  
**Creating New Government and a New Constitution**  
**Grade 8**  
**Civics**

**Unit Outcome (Michigan Curriculum Framework)**

**8 – U3.3.3** Describe the major issues debated at the Constitutional Convention including the distribution of political power, conduct of foreign affairs, rights of individuals, rights of states, election of the executive, and slavery as a regional and federal issue.

**8 – U3.3.4** Explain how the new constitution resolved (or compromised) the major issues including sharing, separating, and checking of power among federal government institutions, dual sovereignty (state-federal power), rights of individuals, the Electoral College, the Three-Fifths Compromise, and the Great Compromise.

**Lesson Outcomes**

The Learner Will (TLW) work collaboratively with other students to create a metaphor for the three branches of the federal government (ex: “The three branches of government are like a tricycle because...”).

TLW work collaboratively with other students to create a visual representation of their metaphor on a poster board.

TLW use written and verbal skills to explain their metaphors to their classmates.

TLW develop and further their understanding of the three branches of government.

TLW think critically to establish metaphors and parallels for the three branches of government.

**Rationale/Purpose**

For students to better understand subject matter, it is important for them to be able to relate the content to their everyday life. Additionally, an understanding of the three branches of the federal government creates a basis for understanding the state and local systems of government. This lesson attempts to both further the students’ understanding of the three branches of the federal government and create parallels to their everyday life. Most importantly, it is an opportunity for students of varying learning styles (visual/spatial, verbal, social, physical, etc) to all be collaboratively creative in creating a final product.

**Assessment**

The students will be given a list of ten necessary items from the three branches of government that they must include in their poster, as well as a larger list of secondary items from which they must include another ten. The primary form of assessment will be the

students' ability to make logical connections to their metaphor. This will account for 60% of their grade (three points per item). They must include a list of their twenty items included, along with one sentence explanations as to their relevance.

Beyond this, the students will also be graded on the visual appeal of their poster – it should not just be a list of reasons that their metaphor makes sense, but rather should include a visual representation of the metaphor (20% of grade). They will also be graded on the level of cooperation within the group – the final product should not have been done by one member of the group while the others sat and watched. This will be judged through “roaming” the classroom while the students are working (20% of grade).

### **Resources/Materials**

Text Book

Notes

Pen/Paper/Pencil

Several poster boards (approx. 7 per class)

Markers, crayons, and other art supplies

Introductory handouts (as needed) [\*\*template included at end of lesson plan\*\*]

### **Introduction**

As per usual, the students will be given a journal entry to complete upon entry into the classroom and put them in a “school” frame of mind. As this lesson is a review and the students have already been taught the subject matter, the journal entry does not need to be something leading into the content. It can be something that relates to the teamwork aspect of the lesson (“What is a situation in which you had to work as a team with others?”) or something else related to the lesson (i.e. metaphors).

### **Procedures**

#### **Day 1**

- As students enter the room the journal prompt should already be on the board and the students will complete this upon entering the classroom (approx. 5 minutes).
- As students finish their journal entry, begin handing out introductory handouts. Once all students have the handout, explain that they are going to be broken up into (pre-determined) groups of 3-4 students. Explain the activity as shown on the sheet, answering any questions that arise (approx. 10 minutes). In your explanation include the following:
  - Their first goal as a group will be to come up with a metaphor for the three branches of government. The example on the handout is a tricycle, but other examples should be shared verbally (a school, a happy meal, a basketball team...)
  - After establishing their metaphor they should list the ways in which it is like the three branches of federal government on one side of a sheet of paper, and

draw out a template for their poster board on the other side. Once completed, this is to be approved by the teacher.

- During this planning period the teacher should be roaming the classroom, assisting where needed and steering groups in the right direction, avoiding side conversation and horse play (this planning/preparation time should take 10-15 minutes).
- Upon approval of their template, give groups a poster board and a set of markers. These groups may begin working on the final draft of their poster board.
  - Be sure to impress upon the students that they will only be given the rest of today's class and a limited amount of time the following day to finish their poster boards, so they must work diligently.
  - As all of the groups get their templates approved and begin working on their final drafts, the teacher should be roaming the class, again helping with problems that arise and giving suggestions, while discouraging off-track behavior.
- As the period nears completion, ask the students to turn in their poster boards and markers. Remind them that they will be given a limited amount of time to finish the art aspect of the project the following day, so if they wish to work on them after school or before school the following day they may. Students may also come get theirs after school to work on at home, but this is discouraged unless all group members can be there to work on it.

## Day 2

- As students enter the classroom they will again have a journal entry. The students should remember that they will be working on their posters again today so the journal entry can be something fun for them to talk about (i.e. "What are your weekend plans?") (approx. 5 minutes).
  - Upon completion of journal entries, instruct the students to re-join their groups from the previous day. Let them know that they will be given only 15 minutes to finish their posters, so they must work efficiently (15 minutes).
- After the posters have been completed, the students will present them (as a group) to the rest of the class. This will be brief (approx. 3-4 minutes per group), so there should be only one speaker for the group. Speakers should include an explanation of their metaphor, and approximately five of the parallels they drew with the three branches of the federal government.
- After finishing presentations, any time left in class will be used for a full class discussion on the projects.
  - What were some of their favorite examples?
  - What posters did they think were the most creative with their metaphors?
  - What posters were the most artistically well done?
- Posters can be hung inside or outside the classroom after school for other students to see.

### **Extension Activities**

As this is a lesson to be used at the end of a unit, there is not much opportunity for extension beyond the project. If left with extra time after the second day it would not be difficult to extend the conversation as much as possible. I believe that it is good to end a unit not only with a test, but perhaps with a test and an art-based project like this one (or a paper, a skit – really to add something as a final grade in a unit besides just a test). With that said, this lesson is in itself an extension activity on the entire previous unit.

### **Closure**

As mentioned previously, the students' grade for the poster project will be 60% from content, 20% from the visual representation, and 20% based on their ability to work well together. The section based on teamwork allows for individualized grades – if a team of four has three members readily contributing and one who chooses not to be a part (or is disruptive, etc), then they should not all receive a lower grade as the result of one individual.

Beyond just the grading criteria, the teacher can check for comprehension through the ability of the students to think abstractly in their metaphors and parallels. If groups are thinking too “one dimensional,” then the teacher can attempt to expand their thought process through personal help during group periods.

### **Instructor Evaluation and Reflection**

- Did the students “buy in” to the lesson? Were they able to come up with unique and interesting metaphors?
- Did groups work well together? Ideally the groups will be “engineered for success” in the sense that they should all (as best as possible) include someone on the “artsy” side of the spectrum, someone who is good with thinking “outside the bubble,” and also some more verbal members. Did this happen?
- Was time used effectively? If not, how can it be improved? Should this be a three day lesson with an entire day spent on poster design and an entire day for presentations?

# The Three Branches of Federal Government Are Like A...

## Introduction

In this activity you will be broken into groups of 3-4 students. Your objective is to create a metaphor for the three branches of the federal government.

This metaphor will be expressed on a poster board on which you will list 20 ways in which your metaphor is like the federal government (10 of my choosing, and 10 of yours). The poster should include a visual representation of your metaphor, as well as a listing of the similarities you choose to show.

## 10 Required

|                                 |                        |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Judicial Branch                 | Individual Politicians |
| Executive Branch                | Republican Party       |
| Legislative Branch              | Democratic Party       |
| Voters                          | Party Leaders          |
| Senate                          | Independents           |
| House of Representatives        | Interest Groups        |
| President                       | Lobbyists              |
| Vice President                  | The Press              |
| The Constitution                | Federal Reserve        |
| Checks and Balances             | Founding Fathers       |
| 10 of Your Choosing             | Ambassadors            |
| Speaker of the House            | Bill of Rights         |
| President Pro Tempore of Senate | Ammendments            |
| Secretary of Defense            |                        |
| Secretary of the Treasury       |                        |

## Example

A tricycle is like the three branches of the federal government because...

- The three wheels function like the three branches of government.
- The front wheel is like the president because it tries to steer the agenda.
- The seat is like the people of the United States because they're along for the ride.
- The frame is like the Constitution, because it holds the branches together.
- The two handles are like the Senate and the House, because they have to work together