



# CIVICS CLASSROOM CURRICULUM

CITIZENS CLEAN ELECTIONS COMMISSION ★ YOUTH VOTER EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

**7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup>**  
**GRADE LEVELS**

**LESSON 3**  
**THE THREE BRANCHES OF  
THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**



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# Civics Classroom Curriculum

## The Three Branches of the Federal Government

 AZCleanElections.gov



TOPICS 	GRADE LEVEL
Government Checks and Balances	<b>7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup></b>

### INTRODUCTION

The Citizens Clean Elections Commission (CCEC), in partnership with expert curriculum writers, presents the Civics Classroom Curriculum lesson series, which covers a variety of relevant topics including democracy, elections, government, and the political party system. This is a part of CCEC's youth voter education and outreach initiative.

These lessons in Civic Education aim to promote an understanding and appreciation of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy, encourage participation and civil dialogue, and develop civics skills such as critical thinking, researching, and determining fact versus fiction or opinion.

Research shows that lifelong voters cast their first votes early in life. The lesson plans adhere to Arizona's classroom teaching standards and are applicable within more than one subject. The respective subjects are listed in the Integrated State Standards section of this module. The lesson plans were designed with teachers in mind and with utmost admiration for their important work.



# LESSON PLAN:

## THE THREE BRANCHES OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



### OVERVIEW

This lesson is designed to be a student-centered discovery activity in which students research (on the Citizens Clean Elections Commission website: [www.azcleanelections.gov](http://www.azcleanelections.gov)) the three branches of the federal government and the checks and balances that exist among them. It may be either a class activity and a homework assignment or both, perhaps even a “flipped classroom assignment.” Your instruction should include a discussion of their research after they have completed their packets. It is always important to discuss credible sources, digital responsibility and digital citizenship as well. This lesson provides a good opportunity to do so.

*\*Note to teacher: Be sure to familiarize yourself with the idea of checks and balances as well as multiple examples of each, such as the president’s veto power of legislation; Congress’s right to impeach; and the supreme court’s judicial review over laws passed by Congress (Constitutionality).*

The following is a multi-day lesson plan for a middle school class. Appropriate State Standards are listed below the lesson plan.

### I. Materials needed

Students will need access to the internet and a laptop or computer. Teacher will provide a PDF of the Student Research Packet to each student. Teacher and students will reference the Citizens Clean Elections Commission website ([azcleanelections.gov](http://azcleanelections.gov)).

### II. Do Now/Warmup

For the Do Now activity, frontload Key Vocabulary. Discuss the following terms and phrases that they will need for the lesson and ask students to look them up. After they have had time to do so, discuss the terms and possible applications to real life.

**Key Vocabulary:** Veto; override a veto; impeachment; term limit; checks and balances; executive order; judicial review.



### III. Student-Friendly Objective

Post and share the objective with students after the warmup activity: Students will participate in a whole class discussion during a closure activity to illustrate their understanding of the three branches of the federal government (and their checks and balances) in order to recognize how their decisions and actions affect the lives of students and their families.

### IV. The Why of the Lesson

By understanding the three branches of the federal government and their roles and their interactions, students will have a better sense of how the Founding Fathers framed the Constitution to provide checks and balances so one branch will not overstep its boundaries and assume too much power.

### VI. Lesson/Delivery

The teacher will have made hard copies or a PDF of the Lesson Three Student Research Packet to provide to each student. The lesson has been introduced in the Warm Up, Objective and the Why of the lesson. In class (or perhaps before class as homework), students will go to the Citizens Clean Elections Commission website (provided below within the study guide) and research the branches of government.

**Students:** To complete the packet, please go to the Citizens Clean Elections Commission website ([www.azcleanelections.gov](http://www.azcleanelections.gov)). Use the information found there to complete the following study guide.

**Instruction for students:** As you answer the following questions, look for ways that the three branches of government (Executive, Legislative, Judicial) “check” each other so no single branch has too much power, i.e., checks and balances.

### VII. Closure

Discuss the answers to the Student Research Packet, especially the terms and phrases in the Key Vocabulary.

**Real Life Discussion Question:** Do you think the President should be limited to two terms? Why or why not? Representatives in the House of Representatives and Senators have no term limits. Should they? Why does the President and not others, do you think?



**Real Life Discussion Question:** An important part of our government that the Founding Fathers established is a system of “checks and balances” among the President, Congress and the Supreme Court. Based on what you just discovered in the information above, what is one example? That is, how does one branch check another? Now look up “checks and balances” to find real life examples.

## VIII. Homework

### Real Life Research:

1. Search the Clean Elections website ([www.azcleanelections.gov](http://www.azcleanelections.gov)) to find out who the two U.S. Senators are from Arizona. What can you determine about what they believe in/stand for?
2. Using your address and zip code, find out what Congressional District you live in (of the nine in AZ). Then determine who your elected representative is in the U.S. House of Representatives. What can you find out about what they believe in/stand for?
3. Choose one of these elected officials and do some research on what they stand for. What are their beliefs? What policies do they support? How do you feel about their politics?
4. How do you think the elected official you chose might affect you and your family?



## INTEGRATED STATE STANDARDS

Choose from the following standards for your lesson

### GRADE 7

**7.SP.3.1** Create compelling questions and supporting questions that reflect enduring issues about the world, past and present.

**7.SP.3.2** Use evidence drawn from multiple sources to develop and support claims and counterclaims in response to compelling questions.

**7.SP.3.5** Evaluate the relevance and utility of sources based on information such as author, date, origin, intended audience and purpose.

**7.SP.3.6** Construct and present arguments based on claims and counterclaims while pointing out the strengths and limitations of those arguments.

**7.SP.3.7** Construct and present explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples and details, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations.

**7.SP.4.3** Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument.

**7.SP.4.4** Compare the central arguments in multiple secondary sources on a related topic using multiple types of sources.

**7.RI.6** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.

**7.RI.8** Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

**7.RI.9** Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.

**7.RI.10** By the end of the year, proficiently and independently read and comprehend informational texts and nonfiction in a text complexity range determined by qualitative and quantitative measures appropriate to grade 7.

**7.W.1** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

- a. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
- b. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
- c. Use words, phrases and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons and evidence.

- d. Establish and maintain a formal style.
- e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

**7.W.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above).

**7.W.6** Use technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

**7.W.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

**7.W.8** Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

**7.W.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research. Apply grade 7 Reading Standards to informational text and nonfiction.

**7.SL.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- a. Come to discussions prepared having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.
- b. Follow rules for collegial discussions, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines and define individual roles as needed.
- c. Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.

**7.SL.4** Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, appropriate vocabulary, facts, details and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume and clear pronunciation.

**7.SL.5** Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.





## GRADE 8

**8.SP4.6** Construct and present arguments based on claims and counterclaims while pointing out the strengths and limitations of the arguments.

**8.SP4.7** Construct and present explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples, details with relevant information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations.

**8.SP4.8** Present arguments and explanations on topics of interest to others to reach multiple audiences in and outside of the classroom print, oral and digital technologies.

**8.C1.2** Demonstrate civic virtues that contribute to the common good and democratic principles within a variety of deliberative processes and settings.

**8.C1.3** Analyze the influence of personal interests and perspectives when people address issues and problems in government and civil society.

**8.C1.4** Engage in projects to help or inform others such as community service and service-learning projects.

**8.C2.1** Analyze the powers of citizens in a variety of governmental and non-governmental contexts.

**8.C2.2** Explain specific roles, rights and responsibilities of people in a society.

**8.C2.3** Analyze concepts and ideals such as majority and minority rights, civil dissent and the rule of law.

**8.C3.1** Describe the impact of political and civic institutions such as political parties, interest groups, elections and the media in shaping policy. Key concepts include but are not limited to political party platforms, structure of parties on a national, state and local level including precincts, primary and general elections, presidential nominating system including conventions, congressional elections including congressional districts, gerrymandering and census, electoral college including how electors are chosen in Arizona, types of interest groups and role of the media.

**8.C3.3** Compare the structures, powers and limits of government at distinct levels in the United States.

**8.C4.2** Assess specific rules and laws (both actual and proposed) as means of addressing public problems.

**8.C4.3** Analyze the purpose, process, implementation and consequences of decision making and public policies in multiple settings and at different levels including the national, state, local (county, city, school board) and tribal.



**8.C4.4** Identify, research, analyze, discuss and defend a position on a national, state or local public policy issue including an action plan to address or inform others about the issue.

**8.C4.5** Analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at the local, regional and global levels, identifying its characteristics and causes and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem. Apply a range of deliberative and democratic procedures to take action and solve the problem.

**8.H2.1** Explain how different beliefs about the government's role in social and economic life have affected political debates and policies in the United States.

**8.RI.1** Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**8.RI.2** Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

**8.RI.8** Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

**8.RI.9** Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.

**8.RI.10** By the end of the year, proficiently and independently read and comprehend informational texts and nonfiction in a text complexity range determined by qualitative and quantitative measures appropriate to grade 8.

**8.W.1** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

- a. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
- b. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
- c. Use words, phrases and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons and evidence.
- d. Establish and maintain a formal style.
- e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

**8.W.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

**8.W.6** Use technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

**8.W.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

**8.W.8** Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

**8.W.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research. Apply grade 8 Reading Standards to informational text and nonfiction.

**8.W.10** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes and audiences.

**8.SL.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- a. Come to discussions prepared having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.
- b. Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.
- c. Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations and ideas.
- d. Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views based on the evidence presented.

**8.SL.2** Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

**8.SL.4** Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume and clear pronunciation.

**8.SL.5** Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence and add interest.