

ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL LOCAL GOVERNMENT CURRICULA

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Title: Who's Got the Power?

Theme: Who has the power...the legislative, executive, or judicial branch of local government?

GLCE:

2-C3.0.1: Give examples of how local governments make, enforce, and interpret laws (ordinances) in the local community

Materials Needed: Downloads 1-8
Internet Access (optional)
Overhead Projector
Index Cards
Paper

Methodological Procedures:

Day 1 – Review the three branches of government (per unit 1) and the main duty of each. To do this, pass out index cards with the different forms of local government, the three branches of government, the role of each branch, and the important people involved (download #1). There should be enough cards for each student to have at least one. Place the title card “The Three Branches of Local Government in the State of Michigan” up on the board. Assemble a diagram using the cards that is representative of local government and the division of power. Once the diagram is complete, have students transfer the information onto the graphic organizer (download #2).

Day 2 – Investigate the legislative (makes the laws) and executive (enforces the laws) branches of government. Have students visit a city or village website such as: (<http://www.statelocalgov.net/state-mi.htm> or <http://www.statelocalgov.net/state-mi.cfm>). These are helpful sites for locating a city or village in the State of Michigan. Complete the city council scavenger hunt (download #3) based on the information found at that site. If the Internet is not available, consider stopping by city hall and picking up some hard copies of this information. You could also conduct a conference call (with a city hall official on speakerphone) and have students' questions answered that way. A final option is to have a city official visit the classroom. Once students have the answers to these questions, have them construct a Venn diagram (download #4) comparing these two branches of government.

Day 3 – Have students retrieve the Venn diagram that they previously used to compare the executive and legislative branches of government. Review the powers of each and have students write a paragraph about which of these two branches they feel has the most power. The tone of the paragraph should be a persuasive one as students try to convince their audience about which branch has the most power. Encourage them to use examples

from the Venn diagram to support their opinion. Use a rubric (download #5) to aid students in the developing of their opinion papers. Collect the paragraphs and sort them based on students' opinions about which branch has the most power. You will need these papers sorted for the next lesson.

Day 4 – The Great Debate Day! You will begin this day's lesson by placing students into groups. Each student will be placed in a group with other students that shared their same opinion about which branch of local government has the most power. Remind students yet again that the legislative branch makes the laws and the executive branch enforces the laws. Introduce yourself, the teacher, as part of the judicial branch. Tell students that the job of the judicial branch is to interpret the laws. Today you will be playing the role of "judge." You will listen to both sides of the issue and then deliver a verdict. Students that feel the legislative branch of government is the most powerful will present their side, and students that think the executive branch is the most powerful will present theirs. After listening to "the great debate" your job will be to deliver the verdict. Which of these two branches is the most powerful? This is your opportunity to share with students that no branch of government has more power than the other. Your verdict will not be in favor of either branch because both branches have equal power. You may want to reference the Ben's Guide to Government website at <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/index.html> to aid both you and your students in this discussion. Some key points to drive home with students are that:

- ◇ The Constitution is the supreme law of the land.
- ◇ When our Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution, they made sure that no branch of government or its persons had too much power or authority.
- ◇ The Separation of Powers involves the equal sharing of power/duties among three branches of government: the legislative, executive, and judicial.
- ◇ Checks and Balances allow each branch of government to check on the other branches and make sure that the power among them remains balanced.

Tell students that in local government the legislative branch (city council) cannot make any laws unless they are constitutional. The judicial branch (judges/juries) can check this and interpret whether a law is constitutional or not. The executive branch (city manager/police, etc.) enforce laws, but only if they have been passed by a majority in the legislative branch. All three branches work together to protect citizens' rights and to make sure things run smoothly in local government.

If you have access to a computer lab, you can have students complete an extension activity by going to the Ben's Guide to Government website (above) and completing a fill-in-the-blank activity (download #6). If you don't have access to a computer lab, the fill-in-the-blank activity could be used as an assessment.

Day 5 – By now students should understand the difference between making, enforcing, and interpreting laws. Today students will participate in a few different scenarios to see why it is important to limit the power of each branch of government. To do this, place students into four groups. Hand out a scenario card to each group (download #7). Have

students analyze and discuss the following four scenarios by identifying which branch of government is involved and why it is important to limit this branch's power.

1. A police officer pulls over a red sports car. When he approaches the driver, he asks to see his license and registration. After checking out the driver's information in his police cruiser, the white officer returns and tickets the driver. The officer doesn't ticket the driver for speeding or running a stop sign, but instead tickets him for driving a red car.
 - ◇ What branch of government issued the ticket?
 - ◇ What branch of government will decide whether or not the ticket is fair?
 - ◇ What would happen if there weren't checks and balances in this situation?

2. A student goes to city hall to see the city manager. He asks the city manager to change a nearby parking lot into a basketball court. The city manager says, "Great idea! Kids will love it. Let's start fixing up the concrete tomorrow."
 - ◇ What branch of government decided that the basketball court could be made?
 - ◇ What branch of government is supposed to make such decisions/laws?
 - ◇ What would happen if there weren't checks and balances in this situation?

3. The city council of Rockwood voted that everyone must worship at the Church of Rockwood on Sundays. Some of its citizens were upset and decided to sue the city for taking away their rights as US citizens.
 - ◇ What branch of government made the Church of Rockwood law?
 - ◇ What branch of government will decide if the law is constitutional?
 - ◇ What would happen if there weren't checks and balances in this situation?

4. A local judge sentenced a woman to life in prison for littering at a local park. The judge told the woman that the park is a favorite of his kids and that she must pay the price for not putting her trash in the appropriate container.
 - ◇ What branch of government sentenced the woman?
 - ◇ What branch of government will decide if the sentence is fair?
 - ◇ What would happen if there weren't checks and balances in this situation?

After students have had the opportunity to hear and think about the four scenarios, have them complete a journal entry (download #8) about why governmental power is separated into three branches and why it is important to have the system of checks and balances.

Author's Notes:

Day 1 – The cards should be color-coded to help students visualize the different powers associated with each branch of government. For the graphic organizer,

there is a student version and a teacher version to help students transfer their learning from the diagram on the board to their own graphic organizer.

Day 2 – Not every city/village in the State of Michigan will have the information that students are looking for on the scavenger hunt. Consider finding a website beforehand that meets your students’ scavenger hunt needs, or adapt the download.

Day 3 – The opinion paragraphs can be written independently or with a partner depending on how you plan to assess. You could also do the writing as a whole group. One paragraph could be written from the perspective of the legislative branch while the other could address the executive branch perspective.

Day 4 – Depending on class size you may have two, four, or even six groups. To make the debate between the legislative and executive groups as fair as possible it may be important to make sure that there are equal numbers of participants in each group.

Day 5 - You may want to consider rotating the scenarios around so that each group has a chance to think about and apply what they know about sharing power among the three branches. Another option is to have each group share their scenario and thoughts with the class.

Assessment Strategies: Many of the available downloads can easily be used as assessment pieces. Consider using the graphic organizer, the scavenger hunt, the Venn diagram, the opinion paper, and the journal entry for assessment.

Enrichment Suggestions/Resources: See Day #4 and Download #6 for an enrichment opportunity using a great website.

Available Downloads:

- Download #1 – Local Government Cards
- Download #2 – Local Government Graphic Organizer
- Download #3 – City Council Scavenger Hunt
- Download #4 – Legislative/Executive Venn Diagram
- Download #5 – Opinion Paper Rubric
- Download #6 – Ben’s Guide to Government Web Activity
- Download #7 – Separation of Power Scenario Cards
- Download #8 – Checks and Balances Journal Entry

Suggested Websites:

- <http://www.cccoe.net/govern/>
- <http://pbskids.org/democracy/>
- <http://www.statelocalgov.net/state-mi.cfm>
- <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/index.html>