

- Encourage students to learn more about governments around the world. Each student should select a country and research what its government is like. Then students can compare this government with the American system of government in a Venn diagram.
- As a class, clearly list your classroom rules on chart paper. After all of the rules have been compiled, help students to determine the purpose of each of the rules. Are they designed to keep students safe? To keep order in the classroom? Encourage students to discuss what would happen if there were no classroom rules.
- Before the American Revolution, America was ruled by a British king named George III. Share Jean Fritz's story *Can't You Make Them Behave, King George?* (Putnam Publishing Group, 2000) with your students to help them understand what life in the American colonies was like under the rule of a king. Based upon the information they gain from this story, students can write journal entries as if they lived during those times. Students can also learn more about the past, present and future of the British monarchy by visiting the following web site: www.royal.gov.uk/output/Page1.asp.
- Students can choose a significant person from the history of American government: a President, Congressperson or Supreme Court justice. Students can learn about this influential person through Internet and print resources. Then students can present their information by portraying the person in costume for the class.
- For American democracy to work well, citizens need to participate in government! Discuss with students what they can do to be good citizens: picking up trash, saving energy, being nice to classmates, etc. Encourage students to pick one activity and to draft a "good citizenship" plan. Students should keep a log of their activities as they make their plan a reality, discussing how being a good citizen made them feel. Students can also discuss how being a good citizen helps to make American government run.

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.cia.gov

"The World Factbook" is sponsored by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and enables students to discover information about governments around the world. On the main page of the CIA site, click on the "World Factbook" link.

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- bensguide.gpo.gov/
"Ben's Guide to U.S. Government for Kids" is a wonderful site with grade-specific material on the character and history of American government. Details about the functioning of the American form of government are provided, in addition to information about why government is important.
- www.whitehousekids.gov
The web site of the White House has a special section for kids, which includes a tour of the White House, information about the President's family and an American History interactive quiz. A helpful guide for teachers and parents is also provided.

Suggested Print Resources

- Burgan, Michael. *The Declaration of Independence*. Compass Point Books, Minneapolis, MN; 2001.
- Kennedy, Edward. *My Senator and Me: A Dog's Eye View of Washington, D.C.* Scholastic Press, New York, NY; 2006.
- Kishel, Ann-Marie. *What is Government?* Lerner Publications Company, Minneapolis, MN; 2007.
- Sobel, Syl. *The U.S. Constitution and You*. Barron's Educational Series, Hauppauge, NY; 2001.

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COMPLETE LIST OF TITLES

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|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| • AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP | • A HISTORY OF THE PRESIDENCY |
| • FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT | • THE THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT |
| • THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT | • WHAT IS GOVERNMENT? |

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WHAT IS GOVERNMENT?

Grades K-4

This guide is a supplement designed for teachers to use when presenting programs in the video series *American Government for Children*.

Before Viewing: Give students an introduction to the topic by relaying aspects of the program overview to them. Select pre-viewing discussion questions and vocabulary to provide a focus for students when they view the program.

After Viewing: Review the program and vocabulary, and use the follow-up questions and activities to inspire continued discussion. Encourage students to research the topic further with the Internet and print resources provided.

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Program Overview

Government is how people take care of important things they share, such as the need for safety. People need government because they cannot get things done all by themselves. The kind of government that Americans have is just one of many. However, most governments have certain things in common, like creating and enforcing special rules known as laws to help create order and accomplish tasks. In the American system of government, the authority to make laws comes from the entire body of citizens. This type of government, in which power comes from the people, is called a democracy.

Another common type of government is called a monarchy, which is ruled by kings and queens. In earlier times, many countries were monarchies with powerful kings and queens. Today, however, most monarchies are limited in their power because elected groups make the laws. Governments with no limits on their power are called dictatorships, and their rulers, called dictators, are not elected by the people and typically keep power through the use of military force. These governments seldom rule for the benefit of the country, and their power does not come from the people. Dictators use their unlimited power destructively, hurting the people they govern. In democracies, by contrast, the powers of government are limited by law, and elected officials can be removed from office by the citizens during elections. This system of government tries to ensure that everyone follows the same rules, that society is kept safe and orderly, and that the important tasks of government are accomplished. Thus, everyone needs government, but the most effective governments derive their power from the people they govern.

Vocabulary

government — The people and groups who make, carry out and enforce rules and laws, and who manage disputes about them.

rules — Guidelines that tell people what they can and cannot do.

laws — Written rules that are made and enforced by governments.

constitution — A document that describes what government is allowed to do and what it is not allowed to do. The U.S. Constitution is the highest law in America.

representatives — People who are chosen to speak for others.

democracy — A form of government in which people rule themselves.

U.S. Congress — The law-making body for federal government.

state legislature — The law-making body for state government.

city council — The law-making body for local government.

tax — Money paid by people to support the work of government.

judges — People who interpret laws to find out what they mean and apply them to individual cases to decide if the law has been broken.

limited government — Government that is restricted by laws.

U.S. Supreme Court — The highest court in the United States.

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E Pluribus Unum — The motto of our country, which is in Latin. In English, this phrase means “out of many, one.”

monarchy — A type of government headed by a single person called a king or queen.

dictator — A ruler who has unlimited power.

unlimited government — Government that has no restraints on the power of its rulers.

consent of the governed — The idea that people have to agree to their form of government. This consent, or agreement, is often given when people vote in elections.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Brainstorm with students about what comes to mind when they hear the word “government.” Help them to generate a list of things that government does. Students can also imagine what life would be like without government.
- Students can discuss the rules that they are required to follow at home and at school. Can they think of some laws established by U.S. government? How are these rules and laws similar and different? What do students think a world without rules and laws would be like?
- Ask students if they can name some different kinds of government in other countries. Do all governments have a President, like the American system of government? How about law-makers? Do all governments have representatives who make laws? Do people in every country have a say in their government, like American citizens do?

Focus Questions

1. What is government?
2. Why is government important?
3. What are rules?
4. Why are rules useful and necessary?
5. Who makes rules?
6. What are laws?
7. Who makes laws?
8. Why is the United States Constitution important?
9. What is a democracy?
10. How are the services provided by government paid for?
11. What does it mean to enforce a law?
12. Who are judges? What is their job?
13. Describe what limited and unlimited governments are.
14. What does *E Pluribus Unum* mean?

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15. What is a monarchy?

16. What is a dictator?

Follow-up Discussion

- In the United States, the power of government comes from the people. Discuss with students why they think it is important for people to participate in government. Students can generate a list of ways that Americans can get involved.
- Governments around the world differ in how much their power is limited by laws. Discuss with students the similarities and differences between limited and unlimited governments. Which type of government would students prefer to have, and why?
- Many people help to make American government work. Brainstorm with students a list of people who make, enforce and interpret U.S. laws. Which of these government workers do students feel does the most important job, and why?
- Have students discuss why American government requires people to do things they may not want to do, like pay taxes or serve in the armed forces. Do students think this practice is fair? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

- Invite a representative of local, state or federal government to your classroom for a visit to discuss what government is and why it is important. Prepare for the visit by asking students to think of questions they wish to ask the government official, including details about the official’s job, and how the official works to carry out the goals of American government.
- Take the class on a field trip to a police station, firehouse or similar local government location to observe government in action. Students can then create a class book that details what they saw, heard and learned from the experience.
- Ask students to search newspapers and news magazines for references to forms of government other than democracy and bring these articles to school, along with any accompanying photographs, for class discussion. Encourage students to compare these governments to U.S. government.
- Imagine if one of the students in your class could become a dictator and could make all of the decisions — who would be first in line, what students could do at recess, etc. How would that make students feel? Encourage students to record their feelings in journal entry format.

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