

QFT-Primary Source Lesson Plan: Three Branches of U.S. Government

LESSON OVERVIEW			
Name: Kimberlee Brent	Grade: 5 th —8 th grade	Subject: Civics	Location: Zoom
<p>Context & Purpose: <i>This lesson will focus on the three branches of U.S. government. Ultimately, students will know the branches' origins and each branch's role in government and in upholding the Constitution, particularly the Bill of Rights. Depending on the amount of time available, this lesson would need from two days to a week for completion.</i></p> <p><i>Objectives include:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students identify the three branches of government and their Constitutional origin.</i> 2. <i>Students research and describe the roles of each branch of government.</i> 3. <i>Students explain the phrases "separation of powers" and "checks and balances" intended with the creation of the 3 branches.</i> 4. <i>Students reflect on new information from the study and describe immediate and future connections to their own lives.</i> 			
<p>Lesson Procedure: <i>Share the sequence of learning activities before, during, and after the QFT</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using a prepared PPT, do a <i>brief</i> class-wide overview of the QFT process and how it will be used in this lesson/unit. 2. Divide class into three groups and provide them with chart paper/marker. 3. Display the primary Qfocus (on PPT slide), an unlabeled image including symbols of the 3 branches of government. 4. Produce—Have students brainstorm questions while one person records them, numbering each question. 5. Reveal/share the phrase "separation of powers" (appears as a title over the primary Qfocus image) and have students record any additional questions that are inspired. 6. I am anticipating that the students will have enough prior knowledge to recognize that the infographic is related to government, <i>but if not</i> the text from Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution will be used as an addition to the Qfocus. 7. Improve— Have students identify questions as "open-ended" or "closed" and refine/revise questions by changing at least one question from open-to-closed or closed-to-open. 8. Strategize—Have students prioritize their questions by placing a star next to 3 questions in which they are most interested or believe will lead to the most information about the Qfocus image and phrase. 9. Strategize—Students discuss ways to find answers to their questions. Print sources will be available and students will have access to laptops. These websites will be provided as resources to get students started: https://www.history.com/topics/us-government/three-branches-of-government https://www.history.com/topics/us-government/checks-and-balances 10. Share—At the conclusion of their research, groups will organize the information they have compiled. A large piece of poster paper will be placed in the front of the room. One person at a time, members from each group will record one piece of information (as a statement) discovered during their research without duplicating a statement already recorded on the poster paper. Students continue taking turns until each group has shared every unique piece of information they have. 			

11. Reflect—using the graphic organizer, **What? So What? What next?** students will write the big ideas they learned in the “What?” column. Next, they write the implications or meaning behind what they learned in the “So What?” column, and finally they write how this information might impact their lives or prompt them to take action in the “Now What?” column.
12. Follow-up project-- At this point, students are aware of the branches of government and each branch’s role. Each group will choose (or be assigned) one of the branches as the topic of an infographic poster. Depending on the depth and sophistication of the information gleaned from the students’ research, additional research time may be needed prior to creation of the posters.
13. Additional Connections—Students reflect again on the third column of the graphic organizer (“What Now?”) and write a journal entry in their social studies journals discussing their own personal take-away(s) from the lesson and how the QFT affected their own learning process.

Next Steps (i.e. how student questions will be used after the QFT): *Share your tentative plans for using student questions to drive subsequent learning*

The questions generated by each group will be on display in the classroom for future reference and continued discussion. Additional lessons will refer back to the questions that students were interested in but did not have the opportunity to pursue such as the history behind the symbols.

Question Focus:

“Separation of Power”



LINK:
https://www.pngkit.com/view/u2w7i1y3e6y3y3t4_introduction-3-branches-of-government-symbols/

Reflect on your QFocus:

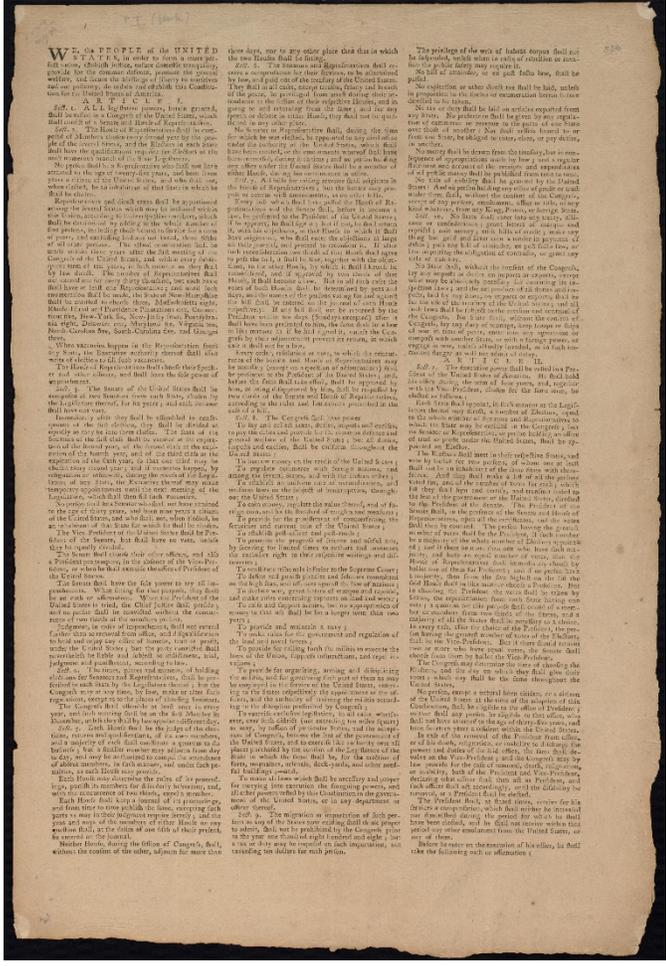
*I wanted an image that illustrated information about the three branches of government **without explicit labeling**. I wanted students to view the images through the lens of their own background knowledge and generate questions based on all the possibilities they could imagine. Unfortunately, I did not find such an image on the LOC website and had to settle for a general Internet search.*

As it stands, I used this image with a test group of students and it worked fairly well as a Qfocus, but I will keep looking for something better. The students I used this with had a vague recollection that “government was three parts” and connected this image with that concept relatively quickly. However, none could explain what the symbols in the image stood for in specific terms. Adding the title “Separation of Power” above the image succeeded in generating additional questions and that was helpful.

This was the first time using QFT for all of us and the students were clearly frustrated that I wasn’t answering their questions or giving them hints about what they should be asking. This shows how much the QFT is needed!

In the end, this image was very supportive of new learning as students researched information about the 3 branches. We came back to the image again and again, noticing and discussing the meaning of details such as the three equal divisions and designation through color as well as symbol.

This image and the title worked well as a Qfocus, but I would still like to find a primary source image that could serve the same purpose, if one exists.



As mentioned in Lesson Procedures #6, the primary source text **Article 1 of the United States Constitution** delineates the formation of Congress outlining all of the duties and responsibilities of both houses and supports the study of the 3 Branches of Government. The language and writing style make this a challenging document to read, but it is important for students to understand that our current system of government, Congress in particular, were instituted in the Constitution. It is also significant that Congress is the only branch of government tasked with representing the voice and interests of “the people.”

United States. Constitutional Convention (1787)
Carter, John, 1745-1814, printer.
Constitutional Convention Library Collection (Library of Congress)

LINK:
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/bdsdcc.c0802/?sp=1>

Tailoring Instructions: Share any adaptations or tailoring to the standard QFT process that you are planning.

- **Categorization Instructions:** none
- **Prioritization Instructions:** none
- **Reflection Questions:** Using the graphic organizer, *What? So What? What Next?*, students record the big ideas they learned in the “What?” column. Next, they write the implications or meaning behind what they learned in the “So What?” column, and finally they write how this information might impact their lives or prompt them to take action in the “Now What?” column.

- **Other: none**

LESSON OUTCOMES

Student Questions:

Viewing the image only:

- What does this mean?
- Are we supposed to guess?
- Is this an American thing?
- Does it have red, white, and blue because it's American?
- Is that a hammer?
- Why is there a hammer?
- Who uses the hammer?
- Why does the eagle have a shield?
- Is that supposed to be a peace sign?

After adding the title "Separation of Power":

- Does this have to do with government?
- Why does it have three pieces/parts?
- Are there three parts to government?
- Do the pie pieces separate the power?
- What do the pictures stand for?
- Who made the symbols?

Student Reflections Samples:

Reflections from the graphic organizer "What?" section:

New ideas or information:

- President is the head of the executive branch.
- The legislative branch makes laws.
- The legislative branch is also supposed to stand up for the people of the United States.
- There are two parts, or houses, in congress: the House of Reps and the Senate.
- There are 435 representatives in the House of Representatives. The number of representatives from a state is based on that state's population.
- There are two senators from every state in the Senate, equaling 100.
- Each branch of government has power, but they have power over different things.

Confirmation of previous ideas or knowledge:

- Confirmed that the image did represent the 3 parts of government as predicted.

Reflections from the graphic organizer *So What?* section:

- Now I know how it all works. If I see something in the news, I'll know what they're talking about.
- When I'm old enough to vote, I won't be going into it without information.

Reflections from the graphic organizer *"What now?"* section:

- I want to become more educated about politics in this country, so that I don't vote for people who don't actually have the country's best interest at heart.
- When I'm old enough to vote, I will research information about elections and new laws in my local community before I vote on them.

TEACHER REFLECTIONS

Reflect on your lesson design and how well it achieved your objectives.

The image was good in some ways because it prompted the students to think more deeply, especially once they started researching "three parts of government." Interpretations of the symbols came quickly. Adding the title was also useful because it was a big clue that the image was symbolic of bigger ideas.

The lesson and process moved quickly, within a two-hour block. I was satisfied with the students' reflections, which ended up being rather thoughtful considering the shallow nature of their initial questions. Having more time to delve deeper would have made a huge difference. I could tell that they became interested when they realized that the legislature is the only branch that gives voice to the people.

This was a small group of students, so it was tougher for them to generate questions, I think. However, they did adopt the terms/vocabulary very quickly and seemed to apply what they learned to their own lives as citizens and future voters without much guidance.

I think all of the objectives were met, but the lesson could use some tweaks and would benefit by being spread out over several shorter time segments. Reading all the sections of Article 1 of the Constitution was too time-consuming for one lesson, but the first section was enough to spark interest and support the study. Subsequent lessons will focus on delving further into this document.

Which student questions stood out to you? Why?

- Most of the questions tended to focus on details in the image, but in a shallow way. This makes me wonder if the image seemed shallow because it is a cartoonish illustration rather than something more realistic or official looking.
- I was surprised that no one seemed to know the word "gavel." They kept referring to the symbol as a "hammer."
- I was also surprised that several students seemed to be aware that government consists of three "parts" but did not know the word "branches." They did end up learning the term "branches" because their search for "three parts of government" provided the corrected terminology. Problem solved. One point for technology.

Overall, what did you learn from this experience? What questions do you now have?

This has been a great experience. I plan to use QFT with other inquiry projects. I also hope to use it for formative and summative assessment as well. Although I have been extremely impressed with the very extensive and interesting primary sources available through the LOC, I still have a lot to learn about searching (and finding) specific primary documents.