

# Separation of Powers

## Teacher's Guide

**Grade Level:** 5–8

**Curriculum Focus:** Social Studies

**Lesson Duration:** 2–3 class periods

### Program Description

*Separation of Powers* (6:10) – Explore the constitutional limits on the power of government and see how the system of checks and balances works. *National Government* (7:08) – Examine the responsibilities of the national government and see how federalism divides power between the national government and the states. *State Government* (3:39) – See how most of the laws we live by come from state government. *A Presidency Remembered: Ronald Reagan* (3:11) – Take a look at the legacy of President Ronald Reagan.

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### Onscreen Questions

- How is power divided between the branches of government?
  - What is one responsibility of the national government?
  - What is one responsibility of state governments?
  - Why did President Reagan want to cut federal spending on social programs?
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### Lesson Plan

#### *Student Objectives*

- Define the concept of federalism.
- Describe how federalism works at government and school levels.
- Create a written proposal outlining the powers a school-wide government should hold and the powers individual classrooms should hold.

#### *Materials*

- *Separation of Powers* video
- Writing paper
- Pencils and erasers

## Procedures

1. Discuss federalism. What is it? How does it work? Why are certain powers given to the federal government and certain powers given to the states? Talk about the powers and responsibilities of federal and state governments.
  - What federal government powers and responsibilities were presented in the video? Are there other federal powers and responsibilities that you know of? Do you think the federal government should have these powers and responsibilities? Why?
  - What are the powers and responsibilities of state governments? Are there other state powers and responsibilities that you know of? Do you think the state governments should have these powers and responsibilities? Why?
2. Discuss the similarities between how federalism works at the government level and at your school. What are the powers and responsibilities of the student government? What are the powers and responsibilities of individual classrooms? Make a list on the board of the student government and classroom responsibilities.
3. Divide the class into groups of 4–5 students and tell them to imagine that they are part of a committee in charge of redistributing powers between the student government and the classrooms. Ask each group to consider what powers and responsibilities the student government should have, and why. Then think about what powers and responsibilities the classrooms should have, and why.

Tell the groups that they will prepare a written proposal outlining their plan for division of powers and responsibilities. The proposals must include at least five powers or responsibilities of the student government and at least five powers or responsibilities of the classrooms, as well as an explanation for each.

4. Allow time in class for the groups to work on their proposals. Monitor them to assess whether all students are involved in the discussions and proposal work.
5. Once the proposals are finished, have each group present to the class. Discuss the division of powers and responsibilities presented in each proposal. Then have the class vote on the proposal they prefer and ask volunteers to provide reasons why they favor this proposal.
6. As a homework assignment have each student write a paragraph outlining what they learned about federalism from this lesson, how they contributed to their group proposal, and what student government and classroom powers and responsibilities they think are important.

## Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students correctly defined the concept of federalism; accurately described how federalism works at the government and school levels; and wrote unique, thoughtful proposals that clearly identified at least five powers or responsibilities of the student government and at least five powers or responsibilities of the, and provided clear explanations why they proposed this division of powers or responsibilities.

- **2 points:** Students somewhat defined the concept of federalism; generally described how federalism works at the government and school levels; and wrote somewhat unique, thoughtful proposals that identified at least three powers or responsibilities of the student government and at least three powers or responsibilities of the classrooms, and provided adequate explanations why they proposed this division of powers or responsibilities.
- **1 point:** Students were unable to define the concept of federalism; incorrectly or vaguely described how federalism works at the government and school levels; and wrote incomplete or incoherent proposals that identified two or less powers or responsibilities of the student government and two or less powers or responsibilities of the classrooms, and did not provide explanations for this division of powers or responsibilities.

## Vocabulary

### **authority**

*Definition:* The right to give commands; the power to influence the behavior of others

*Context:* The power and authority of the three branches of government are interrelated and shared.

### **federalism**

*Definition:* A system of government in which power is divided between a central authority and constituent political units

*Context:* Our founding fathers devised a system known as federalism, in which power is divided between national and state governments.

### **government**

*Definition:* The office, function, or authority of a governing individual or body

*Context:* The men who wrote the Constitution wanted to create a government strong enough to ensure national interests but limited enough to protect personal liberties.

### **power**

*Definition:* A specific capacity, faculty, or aptitude; the ability or official capacity to exercise control; authority

*Context:* The national government has powers that are specifically delegated to it by the Constitution.

### **responsibility**

*Definition:* Something for which one is responsible; a duty, obligation, or burden

*Context:* One responsibility of the Food and Drug Administration is the inspection of every meat plant in the country.

## Academic Standards

### Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Historical Understanding – Understands the historical perspective.
- Civics – Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government; Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy.
- United States History: Era 3 – Understands the institutes and practices of government created during the Revolution and how these elements were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.
- United States: Era 10 – Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

### The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
  - Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
  - Time, Continuity, and Change
  - Power, Authority, and Governance
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## Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

### ***How To Use the DVD***

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

***Play Video*** – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

***Video Index*** – Here the video is divided into sections indicated by video thumbnail icons; brief descriptions are noted for each one. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

***Curriculum Units*** – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

***Standards Link*** – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

***Teacher Resources*** – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

### ***Video Index***

#### **I. Separation of Powers (6 min.)**

Learn about the three branches of government and the powers held by each.

#### **II. National Government (7 min.)**

Explore the responsibilities of the national government, and see how federal tax dollars are spent.

#### **III. State Government (4 min.)**

See how the states have the power to enact policies and laws not covered by the authority of the national government.

#### **IV. A Presidency Remembered: Ronald Reagan (3 min.)**

Examine the legacy of our 40th president to see how he restored public faith in the presidency but was also responsible for the largest peacetime increase in defense spending.

## Curriculum Units

### 1. Investigating Watergate

*Pre-viewing question*

Q: Should the president be held accountable to the same laws as other citizens?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question*

Q: Why did President Richard Nixon resign?

A: When audiotapes revealed that Nixon was involved in the Watergate cover-up, he faced the possibility of impeachment. He resigned instead of waiting for Congress' decision.

### 2. Creating a Strong Government

*Pre-viewing question*

Q: Who might be the most important people in U.S. history?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question*

Q: Why was the system of checks and balances developed?

A: Our nation's founders created a system with three branches of power to form a government strong enough to ensure national interests but limited enough to protect individual liberties. And, to prevent one branch from exploiting its power at the expense of the others, they devised the system of checks and balances so that power and authority were interrelated and shared by all branches.

### 3. U.S. Domestic and Foreign Policy

*Pre-viewing question*

Q: How do national laws affect your daily life?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question*

Q: What is federalism?

A: Federalism is a system in which power is divided between national and state governments. Our government is based on this system.

### 4. Responsibilities of the National Government

*Pre-viewing question*

Q: How have the policies of the national government benefited your community or state?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question*

Q: What programs receive funding from federal tax revenue?

A: Medicare, Social Security, national defense, national emergency response, and interstate highways receive funding from federal tax revenue.



## 5. The Power of the States

*Pre-viewing question*

Q: What powers do you think individual states should have?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question*

Q: How does state government resemble federal government?

A: The structure and organization of state governments are similar to those of the federal government. Each state's constitution describes its organization and distribution of power and includes a declaration of rights that protects individual liberties. The state government branches are the same as those of the federal government (legislative, judicial, and executive), and they operate under a system of checks and balances.

## 6. President Ronald Reagan

*Pre-viewing question*

Q: What do you know about President Ronald Reagan?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question*

Q: What did Ronald Reagan accomplish during his Presidency?

A: President Reagan reduced government regulation, slowed inflation, helped the economy grow, and restored public faith in the presidency. He was also responsible for the largest peacetime defense spending increase in history.

