Learning Objectives

Through this lesson students will be able to:

- Describe the essential characteristics of state government including the duties, functions, and districts associated with the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.
- Explain the daily impact that state agencies and commissions have on students’ lives and property.
- Illustrate the law-making process at the state level.

STEP BY STEP

- **ANTICIPATE** the lesson by asking students the following question: “Can anyone name one way that the state you live in affects your daily life?”

- **DISTRIBUTE** *The Great State* reading for students.

- **READ** *The Great State* as a class, using active reading strategies with students such as:
  - circling key words and underlining the definitions or,
  - underlining the main idea sentence in each paragraph or,
  - number supporting pieces of evidence in each paragraph.

- **DISTRIBUTE** the graphic organizer and display the graphic organizer transparency.

- **WALK THROUGH** both transparencies of the graphic organizer with the students, allowing them to fill in the blanks.

- **DISTRIBUTE** the review pages, introducing the instructions for each activity, and allow students to complete individually, in small groups, or as a class.

- **REVIEW** student completion and answers as a check for understanding.
You’ve already learned about the United States Constitution. But did you know that states have constitutions too? Each state’s constitution is structured a little bit differently, but most of them are a lot like the U.S. Constitution. Typically, they divide the state government into three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. In this lesson, you will examine the most common layout of state governments.

The State Legislative Branch

On the national level, the legislature is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives. This is called a “bicameral” legislature because it has two houses (“bi” means two and “cameral” means chamber). Most states (but not all) also have a bicameral legislature with a Senate and a House of Representatives. The main job of these houses is to create laws for the state. State legislatures are also responsible for dividing the state into legislative districts. The people in each district elect representatives to serve in the U.S. Congress and the state legislatures.

The State Executive Branch

On the national level, the chief executive is called the president. On the state level, the chief executive is called the governor. The governor’s role is to make sure state laws are carried out. In order to do this, the governor gives executive orders to state government organizations, such as the attorney general’s office or the department of education. The governor has many other powers similar to the powers of the president. For example, governors can issue pardons and veto bills.

The State Judicial Branch

On the national level, the judicial branch is divided into many trial courts, fewer courts of appeals, and one Supreme Court. Most states also have this basic three-level system. Cases begin in the trial court. To fight a trial court’s ruling, people must take their case to the court of appeals. Finally, the state Supreme Court reviews the decisions made by lower courts, supervises the other courts, and interprets the state constitution as it applies to the law.

But state judicial branches have an extra level of courts the national judicial branch does not have—a level below the trial courts. These lower courts handle the thousands of “small” issues that come up every day, such as traffic tickets and minor crimes called misdemeanors. This lower level of courts is necessary to keep all these minor cases from clogging up the regular courts, where more difficult cases are heard.
**Where Bills Come From**

Who comes up with ideas for state laws? Only legislators may introduce a bill in either house, but their ideas come from lots of places. Some ideas come from the legislators themselves, from government agencies such as the state department of education, or even from the governor. Other ideas come from citizens who have an idea for a law that will benefit them and their community. But the majority of ideas come from **interest groups**. These are private groups that work to support special causes by trying to get laws passed that will help those causes. For example, there might be an interest group working to support disabled people or one that supports military veterans.

**Passing a Bill**

In states with a bicameral legislature, the process is very similar to that of the U.S. Congress. First, a legislator introduces a bill in the state House of Representatives. The bill then goes to a committee—a small group of legislators that study bills that relate to a certain topic. The bill might be assigned to a subcommittee—an even smaller group that focused on a narrower topic. The subcommittee will research and study the bill, revise it, and send it back to the committee. After the committee approves the bill, the entire House of Representatives votes on it. If the bill passes, it goes to the other house of the legislature and follows the same process. If it is passed by both houses, legislators come together in a **conference committee** (a committee that includes members of both houses) to work out the differences.

**From a Bill to a Law**

Once the conference committee is done with their work and both houses have approved the final product, it heads to the governor. The governor has two options: sign the bill into law, or keep the bill from becoming law by exercising the power to veto!
The Great State

State Government

Branch

Branch

The main job of the legislature is...

Bicameral means...

Most states have two houses known as the ____________________ and ____________________.

To accomplish this, he or she gives orders to...

The main job of the governor is to...

State Chief Executive: ____________________

Four-level system

Lower Courts: Municipal, City and Justice Courts

Each state constitution is structured
 EXACTLY THE SAME   or    A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENTLY.

State constitutions are very similar to the U.S. Constitution because...

Illinois

New York

Each state constitution is structured
 EXACTLY THE SAME   or    A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENTLY.

State constitutions are very similar to the U.S. Constitution because...
The Legislative Process  It takes many steps to get from a bill introduced on the floor to the desk of the governor. Let’s pretend that a bill is going to start in the House of Representatives. Fill in the blanks to follow the bill all the way to the governor. (And remember the same process can happen when a bill is introduced in the Senate!)
The Great State

**Matching.** Match each word with its definition.

1) Bicameral
2) Legislature
3) Interest groups
4) Conference committee
5) Three
6) Court of appeals
7) Governor
8) Subcommittee

**Name the Branch.** Circle the branch of government each character works for.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I deal with misdemeanors and other small violations.</th>
<th>I work for an agency that helps enact the laws passed in Congress.</th>
<th>I serve on a subcommittee that researches and revises bills.</th>
<th>I have the power to issue pardons and veto bills.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>Judicial</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td>Executive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Checklist.** Imagine that you are responsible for writing the constitution for a new state. Which powers would you include for each branch? Check the powers you would include and write in at least one power that isn’t already listed.

### Executive Branch

- Veto laws
- Appoint judges and the heads of executive agencies
- Declare a state of emergency
- Grant pardons
- Enact laws created by the legislature
- ________________
- ________________

### Legislative Branch

- Create new laws
- Set the budget
- Set agreements with other states
- Override governor’s veto
- Establish local courts
- Investigate other branches
- ________________
- ________________
- ________________

### Judicial Branch

- Interpret the U.S. Constitution
- Interpret the state constitution
- Settle controversies over elections
- Settle controversies over district boundaries
- Hear cases about state laws
- ________________
Fill in the Blank & Number. Use the word bank to fill in the blanks below. After you have completed the sentence, number each (1-9) in the order it happens when a bill becomes a law.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>subcommittee</th>
<th>interest groups</th>
<th>similar</th>
<th>legislator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>conference committee</td>
<td>committee</td>
<td>researched &amp; revised</td>
<td></td>
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1. A bill is sent to a ______________________ to be studied in detail.
2. The subcommittee sends the ____________________________ bill back to the committee for approval.
3. The committee sends the bill to a __________________________ to be researched and revised in more detail.
4. A ___________________________ works out the differences in the two versions of the bill and submits it to the governor.
5. The idea of a bill comes from many places, but mostly from __________________________.
6. The bill is sent to the other house of congress to go through a __________________ process.
7. The committee sends the approved bill back to the floor for consideration, where the bill is ______________________ on.
8. A __________________________ introduces the idea for a bill on the floor of his or her house of congress.
9. The governor decides whether to sign the bill into law or to ______________________ it.

Did You Get the Memo? Legislators have been writing memos about a bill! Read all the memos. Then put the memos in order according to the progress of the bill by numbering them from 1 to 6.

I thought you might be interested to know that I put forward a new topic on the floor of the House today. I hope that you’ll support it as...

At this point, it’s up to the Governor. We’ve done all we can do, and she has to decide if she will sign it into law. Fingers crossed...

The committee handed this bill to us yesterday. For the next few weeks we will be really busy researching, revising, and improving this bill...

It’s always nice to get to see members from the other house of congress. I hope we can quickly and easily work out the differences between...

I had a meeting with an interest group today. They closely represent the voters in my district at home and they have an interesting new idea...

Well, the subcommittee has done its job. We think we’ve done our job. Now it will be up to all of you to approve or reject the bill in a vote...
The Great State

Matching. Match each word with its definition.

D. 1) Bicameral
G. 2) Legislature
B. 3) Interest groups
A. 4) Conference committee
E. 5) Three
F. 6) Court of appeals
C. 7) Governor
H. 8) Subcommittee

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___3___ A bill is sent to a _committee_ to be studied in detail.

___5___ The subcommittee sends the _researched and revised_ bill back to the committee for approval.

___4___ The committee sends the bill to a _subcommittee_ to be researched and revised in more detail.

___7___ A _conference committee_ works out the differences in the two versions of the bill and submits it to the governor.

___1___ The idea of a bill comes from many places, but mostly from _interest groups_.

___6___ The bill is sent to the other house of congress to go through a _similar_ process.

___8___ The committee sends the approved bill back to the floor for consideration, where the bill is _voted_ on.

___2___ A _legislator_ introduces the idea for a bill on the floor of his or her house of congress.

___9___ The governor decides whether to sign the bill into law or to _veto_ it.

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