

MITCH BEATY
UT EXTENSION

Tennessee State Government

DESCRIPTION

For 6th through 8th grade students.

This is a lesson designed to help students better understand State Government and how that government relates to them in their counties.

OBJECTIVES

Students should learn from this lesson:

- The three Branches of State Government
- The governing bodies which make up those branches
- The people who represent them in those branches
 - State Representatives
 - State Senators
 - Governor
 - Tennessee Supreme Court
- The actions and responsibilities of each branch
- Who is responsible for appointing or electing officers to fill those branches
- The definition of the term “Electorate”

TIME REQUIRED TO DELIVER LESSON

One time lesson takes a minimum of 20 minutes and can be expanded to about 40 minutes.

SET-UP

Handout all of the Government pieces there should be 18 including the pictures of the Governor and the Supreme Court.

(Optional) Pass out Handouts so students can work on them as you discuss the lesson (see key for answers)

OPENING IDEAS and DISCUSSION

Say: “Does anyone know the different levels of Government we have?” Give time for answers or discuss...”Well we have our National Government...or Federal Government... who heads that up...that’s right the president...it takes place mostly in Washington DC... we have our Governor in Nashville who heads up the state government...we have our county Mayor who is the top official in the county and then we also have depending where you live a city mayor if you live in the city....all of those levels are important...but today we are going to Focus on the State Government.”

BODY OF LESSON

1. Say: “Does anybody know how many branches there are in our State Government System? There are 3. Can anyone name them?” As branches are named have 4-H’ers bring their branch up and put on the view board...making sure to put them in the proper place.
2. Say: “Lets first look at the Legislative Branch.” There are actually two parts to the Legislative Branch does anyone know what those parts are? They are the State Senate and the State House of Representatives.” Again allow 4-H’ers to bring up the appropriate board piece as it is called and place on the board. You could also say here... “The senate is sometimes referred to as the “Upper House” and the House of Representatives is sometimes referred to as the “Lower House” on our board we have the Senate listed higher for that reason. You might also ask if anyone knows which of the two parts of the legislature is has more members? The House of Representatives is larger with 99 members representing 99 sections or House districts of Tennessee containing about 60,000 people each. The Senate has 33 members representing 33 Senatorial Districts containing about 175,000 people each.
3. Ask: Does anyone know who _____ County’s State Representative is? It is Rep. _____ of _____. Again allow 4-H’ers to bring up the appropriate board piece as it is called and place on the board. Does anyone know what the “R” or “D” in front of his name means? It means he is a republican or democrat which is his political party, all members of the Senate or House are either Republicans or Democrats... when you watch the news on TV and they are interviewing a State Rep or Senator it will usually tell their part either with a D or and R and then the town or city they are from. You could also talk about the term of office for the Representative which is 2 years.
4. Ask: Does anyone know who _____ County’s State Senator is? It is _____ from _____... he has an R beside his name(adapt to the part of your Senator) so he is a member of what party? You could also talk about the term of office for a Senator which is 4 years.
5. Does anyone know what the main duties of the State Legislature would be? They make and pass laws which meet the needs of our state. For example if we need more money for let’s say education.... What is something that the legislature could do... they could raise taxes and designate the money to go toward education.
6. Okay lets move to the Executive Branch. Who is in charge of the executive branch? It is the Governor. Who is our Governor in Tennessee? It is Phil Bredesen. What is the term of office for a governor? 4 years.
7. What are the main duties of the governor? The governor has final word on laws passed by the legislative branch. He must sign them before they become official

- state laws... does anyone know the term used when the governor decides not to sign a law? It is called a veto. The Governor is also in charge of each of the many State Departments which serves the state. Does anyone know a State Department... Education, Transportation, Agriculture, Tourism are some examples. The Governor appoints or selects a person to manage each of the state departments this person is given the title of "Commissioner".
8. Let's move now to the Judicial Branch. Who heads up the Judicial Branch in Tennessee? The Tennessee Supreme Court. Does anyone know what the members of this court all called? They are "Justices" or Judges. There are how many members on this court? 5 including the chief justice. Does anyone know how these judges become members of this court? They are appointed by the Governor and serve for 8 years but may continue to serve indefinitely if they are re-elected. Every 8 years the justices are subject to a simple yes-no vote in the general election to see if they maintain their position. Does anyone know where this court meets? They are required by the State Constitution to meet in Nashville, Knoxville, and in Jackson. They are referred to as the highest court in the state.
 9. Does anyone know their main duties? They oversee the Tennessee Court System and determine if laws passed by the legislature and signed by the governor are "Constitutional" which means that the laws follow the intent or will of the Constitution of Tennessee. Sometimes the Supreme Court may decide a law is not constitutional in which case they may "Strike down" or cancel the law.
 10. Let's now look at the role of each branch of government... What is the role of the Legislative Branch? To Enact Laws. This means they create laws based on the needs of the people. What about the Executive Branch? They Administer Laws. This means they enforce or put into place the laws which are passed by the legislature. What about the Judicial Branch? They Interpret Laws. Which means they determine what the law means or if the law does what it was designed to do.
 11. The final piece of the puzzle is the term we use to describe the most important position we have in state government. The term means the people who are entitled to vote... does anyone know who that is? It is the Electorate. In Tennessee the electorate is made up of people who are 18 or older and are registered to vote. Why is the Electorate the most important part of Tennessee State Government? Because they decide through their votes who will represent them in both the Senate and the House as well as who will be Governor. The Governor then appoints members of the Supreme Court as well as Commissioners for each of the State departments.