

MyTown and the Three Branches of Government: The Mayor Needs Help

Overview

This lesson includes instructions below so that you may opt to conduct it in one of two ways: *Online Together* (if you are conducting a video-conference with a group of students) or *Independent Learning* (if you are giving assignments to students to complete individually at their own pace). In this lesson, students assist the new mayor in solving problems in MyTown by setting up a city council and judge (legislative and judicial branches of government). They read and discuss letters from townspeople and decide which branch of the town's government should handle the problem described in the letter.

Objectives

The students will be able to:

- Distinguish between different branches of government according to function.
- Write a short paragraph on the importance of governments to communities.
- Illustrate why governments are important to communities.

Standards

- Understand ideas about civic life, politics, and government. (National Civics Standard 1, Level II (Grade 3-5), Benchmark 1)
- Understand the need for rules and laws. (California HSS Standard 3.4.1)
- Understand the three branches of government. (California HSS Standard 3.4.4)

Materials & Preparation

Online Together	Independent Learning
Media Presentation is a slideshow to be played for students.	Media Presentation is a slideshow to be shared as a link with students.
Handout 1 — The Mayor Needs Help! Instructions from Sally O'Malley to be shared on screen for students.	Handout 1 — The Mayor Needs Help! Instructions from Sally O'Malley to be assigned for students to complete on their own.
Handout 2— MyTown Government to be assigned for students to complete on their own or to work on as a class responding to each question.	Handout 2— MyTown Government to be assigned for students to complete on their own.
Handout 3 — Writing and Illustration Activity . Paper and pens, pencils, or other drawing supplies. Students may also paste images from the internet to make a collage.	Handout 3 — Writing and Illustration Activity . Paper and pens, pencils, or other drawing supplies. Students may also paste images from the internet to make a collage.

Procedure

I. Introduction

A. Online Together:

1. Explain to students that there is more than one person in the government. Ask students if they know of anyone who is in the government. Possible answers:

- president
- vice president
- governor
- congressperson
- councilmember
- mayor
- judge
- sheriff or police
- anyone else they can identify

2. Ask the students why they think there is more than one person in government. Accept any reasonable response. The main reason for more than one person — in fact, many people — in government is that there are too many things to be done by just one person acting alone.

3. Point out that a new community like the one in the story they are about to watch has the important task to decide who should have responsibilities. It's important because the decisions made by the government impact the entire community. Follow along as we watch "The Mayor Needs Help" and see how you can help MyTown's Mayor.

B. Independent Learning:

1. When communicating the assignment to your students explain that there is more than one person in the government. Some examples include:

- president
- vice president
- governor
- congressperson
- councilmember
- mayor
- judge
- sheriff or police
- anyone else they can identify

2. Explain that the main reason for more than one person — in fact, many people — in government is that there are too many things to be done by just one person acting alone.

3. Point out that a new community like the one in the story they are about to watch has the important task to decide who should have responsibilities. It's important because the decisions made by the government impacts the entire community.

II. Media Presentation: The Mayor Needs Help

A. Online Together:

1. [Play the slideshow "The Mayor Needs Help."](#) As the slideshow plays, you can have students read the characters out loud, or you can read them. Stop to ask questions and check for student understanding along the way.

B. Independent Learning:

1. Ask students to watch the slideshow "The Mayor Needs Help." Encourage them to contact you with any questions.

III. Activity: Instructions From Sally O'Malley and Letters from the Townspeople

A. Online Together: The Whole-Class Discussion Option

1. After the presentation, display on the screen [Handout 1 — Instructions From Sally O'Malley and Letters from the Townspeople](#)

a. Explain to students their most important task today is to help Mayor Johnson decide which part of the town government should handle the different questions that townspeople face. In each letter, the townspeople describes an issue or a problem in the town. The townspeople also asks Mayor Johnson who should help solve that problem. Remind students of the responsibilities of each part of the government they learned about in the "The Mayor Needs Help" media presentation. NOTE: A chart summarizing the following information appears on Handout 1:

- The mayor is the town's chief. That means the mayor carries out (or enforces) the laws of the town. The mayor hires the sheriff, and the sheriff works for the mayor in carrying out the laws. For example, the sheriff makes sure that those who break the law are arrested.
- The judge decides who is wrong and who is right when citizens argue or fight with each other. The judge also oversees cases in court where someone has been accused of breaking the law. The state governor appoints the judges. They are not elected by the people.
- The town council is the group of people who decide what the laws of the town are going to be. The citizens of the town elect them, in the same way that they elect the mayor. That is why the laws that the council makes should reflect what the people of the town want. If the people don't like the laws, they might elect a different town council to make different laws in the future.

b. You may ask a student to read each letter out loud, or you may read each letter out loud.

c. After each letter is read, ask students who they think should handle the problem described in the letter: the mayor, the judge, or the town council. And ask students to say why they think so. See the chart below for guidance.

Letter	Part of Government	Reasons
1	judge	Theo asks for a trial in the letter. Judges oversee trials.
2	mayor	Wallace and Wilbur ask the mayor to enforce a law.
3	mayor	The Vanders want the Perinis arrested. Arresting wrongdoers is part of enforcing laws
4	town council	The Wheelers ask for a new law to be made.
5	town council	The Judds ask for a new law to be made. Only the council can make new laws.
6	judge	David asks the mayor to have someone listen to both sides of a dispute and make a decision. That is what judges do.

2. Debrief the activity. Display [Handout 2 — MyTown Government](#) and work as a class to respond to each question on the handout.

Explain to students, the parts of government here each represent a different branch of government: executive, legislative, and judicial. Our community, state, and nation are all organized with these three branches of government. (Handout 2 includes a chart with information about the three branches of government.)

- Executive. This branch enforces and carries out the laws made by the legislative branch. The governor is a state executive. The president is the national executive. Ask: Who in your town was part of the executive branch? (*mayor*)
- Legislative. This branch makes laws. State governments might have assemblies and state senates. Congress is the national legislative group. Congress is made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Ask: Who in your town was part of the legislative branch? (*town council*)
- Judicial. This is the branch that says what the law is whenever different people argue or have a conflict about what the law means. The highest court in the nation is the Supreme Court of the United States. Ask: Who in your town was part of the judicial branch? (*judge*)

B. Independent Learning: The Individual Distance-Learning Option

1. Share [Handout 1 — Instructions From Sally O'Malley and Letters from the Townspeople](#) with students. Students follow the instructions on the handout.

a. Students can work at their own pace to complete the handout, which asks them to read the short letters and decide who in the town government should help the person in each letter with their problem.

b. In your communications to students, explain to students their most important task today is to help Mayor Johnson decide which part of the town government should handle the different questions that townspeople face. In each letter, the townspeople describe an issue or a problem in the town. The townspeople also asks Mayor Johnson who should help solve that problem. Students must decide who they think should handle the problem described in the letter (the mayor, the judge, or the town council) and write down why they think so on the handout. NOTE: Remind students to keep in mind the responsibilities of each part of the government they learned about in the “The Mayor Needs Help” media presentation, which are summarized on a chart on Handout 1:

- The mayor is the town’s chief. That means the mayor carries out (or enforces) the laws of the town. The mayor hires the sheriff, and the sheriff works for the mayor in carrying out the laws. For example, the sheriff makes sure that those who break the law are arrested.
- The judge decides who is wrong and who is right when citizens argue or fight with each other. The judge also oversees cases in court where someone has been accused of breaking the law. The state governor appoints the judges. They are not elected by the people.
- The town council is the group of people who decide what the laws of the town are going to be. The citizens of the town elect them, in the same way that they elect the mayor. That is why the laws that the council makes should reflect what the people of the town want. If the people don’t like the laws, they might elect a different town council to make different laws in the future.

c. Encourage students to communicate any questions they may have to you.

d. After students have completed reading the letters and deciding which part of the town government should handle the problem in each, they can submit their completed handouts to you.

e. After students submit their completed handouts, use the chart on page 4 to check students’ answers and give them feedback on the assignment.

2. Assign **Handout 2 — MyTown Government** to students. Each student completes the handout individually. In your communications, draw students’ attention to the chart on Handout 2 that explains how the mayor, town council, and judge are each a representative of one of our three branches of our government: executive, legislative, and judicial. (See note III(A)(2) above for more detailed information.)

IV. Assessment

A. In assessing students' handouts submitted to you (including Handout 3 below), use the following standards:

- Understand ideas about civic life, politics, and government. (National Standard 1, Level II (Grade 3-5), Benchmark 1)
- Understand the need for rules and laws. (California HSS 3.4.1)
- Understand the three branches of government. (California HSS 3.4.4)

B. Share [Handout 3 — Writing and Illustration Activity](#) with students. On the handout, have students write and illustrate a single paragraph (2-3 sentences) answering the following question, based upon what they learned from the activity: Why is it important for communities to have governments?

1. Encourage students to be creative in their illustration. Students may print out Handout 3 and draw a picture, then share a picture or scan of the handout with you. If students cannot print the handout at home, they may cut and paste images from the internet to make a collage in the space on Handout 3 and share it with you.

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