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Government Activators

Foundations of U.S. Government



About the author

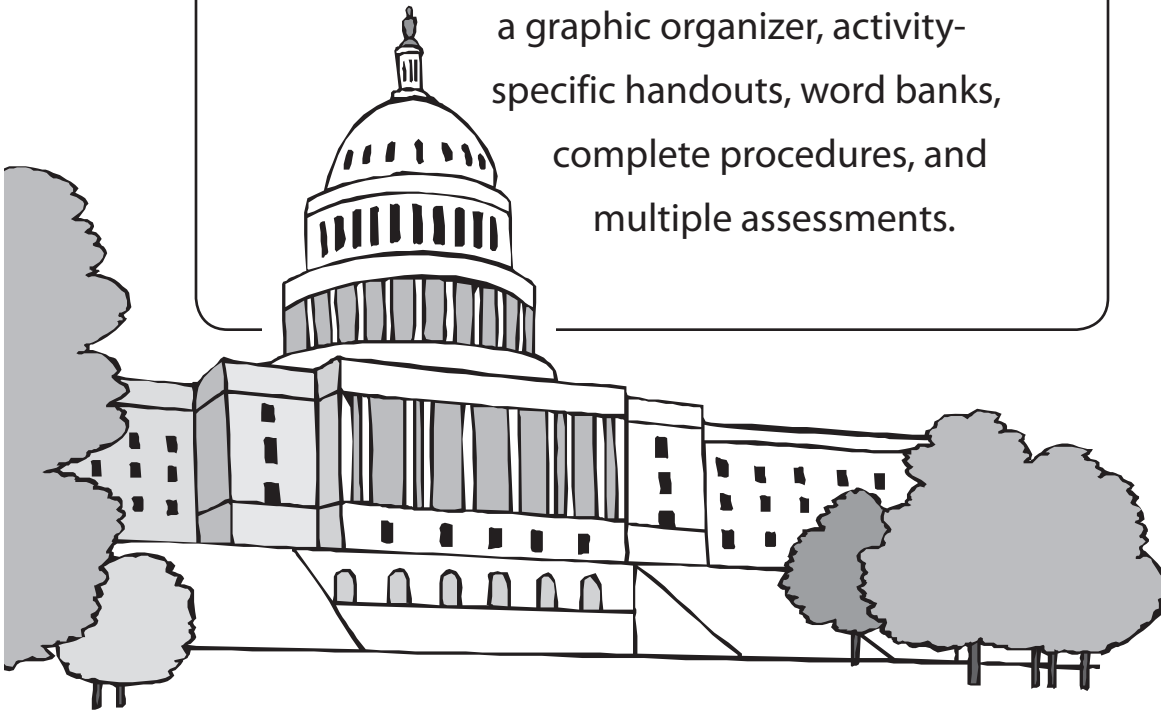
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Welcome to *Government Activators!*

Cooperative active-learning lessons take students deep into the nuts and bolts of U.S. government as they participate in activities such as simulating negotiations between a society's leaders and its people for basic rights, role-playing Cabinet secretaries aiding the president with real-life issues, and trying a Bill of Rights case in a moot Supreme Court. Each lesson includes a historical background essay, a graphic organizer, activity-specific handouts, word banks, complete procedures, and multiple assessments.



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Purpose and Overview

Government Activators consist of ten lessons on the history and operation of the United States government. These lessons provide exciting experiences in “participatory government” for your students. Students will find themselves drawn into the study of civics and government and actively engage in lessons that become compellingly real for them. The first three lessons explore the early roots of American constitutionalism and government, examining how British heritage was translated into American democracy. The next five lessons look at the structure and operation of the three branches of government, the checks and balances between them, and how the concept of federalism establishes dual sovereignty between state and federal entities. The last two lessons examine the history and application of the Bill of Rights, looking back into the past to explain important fundamental rights as they are practiced today.

Activators possess three common elements:

1. The presentation of key academic concepts in civics and history that enhance and expand textbook learning
2. Multiple activities that can stand alone or be used in sequence to provide an in-depth examination of broad concepts and give teachers flexibility in instruction
3. Appeal to a broad range of learning styles—including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—in order to allow students of different abilities to actively participate in their learning

Format

Each Activator highlights a key concept and presents it in four modular learning activities:

- A background reading and study of key words and terms
- A setup or content-building activity
- A main activity
- Debrief and assessment

Teaching Tools

Each Activator contains the following teaching tools:

- Historical Background Essay
- Word Bank
- Setup or Content-Building Activity
- Main Activity
- Assessment Methods

Historical Background Essay

Each lesson begins with a **historical background essay** that provides context and presents the key concepts of the lesson's main theme. Each essay contains focus questions and a graphic organizer for which answers can be found in the text. Information from the essay also provides important information for successfully completing the main activity.

Word Bank

Each lesson contains a **list of important words and terms** highlighted in bold in the historical background essay.

Setup or Content-Building Activity

The **first activity** in each unit builds on the points covered in the historical background essay and helps generate a solid understanding of concepts explored in the main activity.

Main Activity

Each **main activity** presents either full-class or small-group activities that engage every student. Methods include simulations, case studies, role plays, and presentations. These activities examine the fundamental concepts behind current issues of concern in U.S. government and civics and provide students opportunities to present them in innovative ways.

Assessment Methods

Each Activator incorporates authentic **assessments** and also contains **debriefing questions** constructed to help students conceptualize main points and prepare them for the assessment exercise. Two assessment options are available to accommodate a wide range of student abilities. Detailed rubrics are included when appropriate.

How to use Government Activators

Government Activators were designed to supplement your regular civics/ government curriculum. Because the Activators are modular, they can be used in a variety of ways. Some can serve as review units that show the connection between history and fundamental principles in U.S. government. Other Activators can be used to bridge students' learning between principles of government and the application of these principles in the real world.

Teaching Options

Many Activators include “Teacher Tips” which give further suggestions or options on how to conduct each lesson. Study the Teacher Tips carefully and decide which one or combination will work best with your students, schedule constraints, classroom configurations, and administrative support.

Grouping Students

Government Activators promote the idea of students actively participating in their learning. They also allow the teacher to have students take greater responsibility for their learning. Consider the following as potential options when using U.S. Activators in your classroom:

- **Student Facilitators:** Before you begin using the Activators, you may consider selecting four or five student facilitators to present some of the units. Allow each facilitator three or four days to prepare for his or her Activator. Meet with the facilitators before they present the Activators in order to review your standards and expectations for the units. Grant enough latitude so that students may apply their talents—and their time—fully. You might consider having a student “co-present” the unit with you.
- **Small-Group Responsibility:** Before you begin using the Activators, divide your class into small groups and have each group prepare to present one of the lessons. Allow each group three or four days to get ready. Meet with each group before and after the presentation of each Activator in order to review your standards and expectations. Have students pick roles or assign roles to each student so that each presents a different part of the activators.

The Roots of American Democracy

Activator 1

Unit Description

In this activator, students engage in a negotiation between the leaders and the people of an imaginary country. The country is transitioning from a more autocratic government to one where individual rights are protected. The leaders want to maintain order and stability; the people want the leaders to honor their rights. Both groups want to make sure that essential services are provided. During this unit, students will gain an understanding of how the roots of American democracy developed over nearly five centuries of British history and how those roots apply to the relationship between the people's rights and the government's authority.

Before You Begin

Read through the lesson plan and familiarize yourself with the teaching sequence and materials. Consider your students' abilities and needs, available class time, and your curriculum requirements in selecting the activities.

Make Copies

You may need to reproduce the items in this list of masters, depending on the activities you have chosen. Keep in mind that the activities may dictate the number of copies you will need.

- **Background Essay**—one for each student
- **Background Essay Graphic Organizer**—one for each student
- **Demands of the People**—one for each member of the People's negotiating team and each Mediator
- **Demands of the Leaders**—one for each member of the Leaders' negotiating team and each Mediator
- **Mediator's Instructions**—one for each Mediator

Word Bank

(words and terms appear in the **Background Essay**)

- feudalism
- common law
- Magna Carta
- rule of law
- constitution
- Parliament
- divine right
- Petition of Right
- martial law
- limited government
- English Bill of Rights
- petition
- individual rights

Introduce the Unit

Explain to students that the authors of the Declaration of Independence and the framers of the Constitution didn't invent the fundamentals of American democracy. These men studied British history and selected the most important principles to establish the foundation and help shape the government of the United States. In this activity, students put some of these principles into practice. They form small groups, each with three subgroups: one represents the Leaders of a government, one represents the People, and a third group serves as Mediators. The Leaders and People state their positions and negotiate to gain as much power (for the leaders) or rights (for the people) as they can. The Mediators help them come to an agreement.

Daily Directions

Day 1: Provide Historical Context

Use the **Background Essay**, **Graphic Organizer**, and **Word Bank** to provide students with historical context for the activity. As necessary, discuss what students learned from the essay and **Graphic Organizer**. The **Graphic Organizer** can help you check for understanding and be used as part of students' assessment. Students should use their completed **Graphic Organizer** during the main activity.

Prepare the Activity

Make copies of all the handouts needed. Draw a schematic on the front board or create an overhead transparency like the one below.

Day 2: Activity Instructions

Students work in small mediation sessions to come to an agreement between the leaders and the people. These sessions go on simultaneously.

Divide students into small heterogeneous groups of eight. Assign or have students assign to themselves the following roles:

- The People (3 students)
- The Leaders (3 students)
- The Mediators (2 students)

Change your room's configuration to accommodate the simulation. Have students quickly move desks, chairs, and tables.

Distribute the student handouts for each group as follows:

- The People—**Demands of the People**
- The Leaders—**Demands of the Leaders**
- The Mediators—**Mediator's Instructions, Demands of the People, Demands of the Leaders"**

Preparing for the Mediation

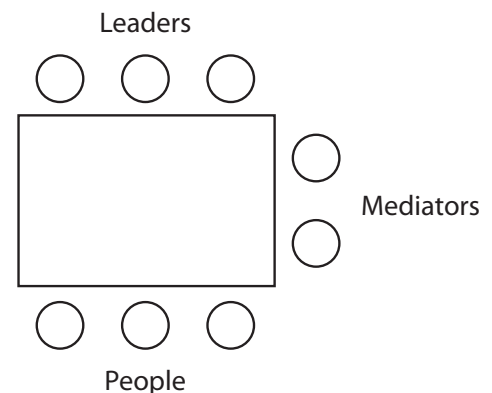
Briefly review the instructions for all three groups. You might also consider meeting with each Mediator to review their role and provide helpful hints to ensure a successful negotiation session. As student complete their priority form, go around the room to help students as needed. The times for the sessions are suggestions only to help students stay on task. If negotiations are



Teaching tip
This can be done as homework or as an in-class activity.



Small group



10–15 minutes



Daily Directions

The Roots of American Democracy

productive and you have enough time, they may go beyond these time limits. Also, at the end the items of agreement have to coincide.

Begin the Mediation



35 minutes

Before the groups begin their sessions, mention to students that although they are representing a particular group, they should keep an open mind and listen to all sides. All three groups (the People, the Leaders, and the Mediators) must realize that they must reach some sort of an agreement. The alternative would be anarchy or civil war, which wouldn't benefit anyone.

When students are ready to begin their negotiation session, have them follow this procedure:

Part 1: The Negotiations Begin



10 minutes

- The People go first and present their position, stating their nine demands in order.
- The Leaders then present their position and state their nine demands in order.
- The Mediators then review which three demands are at the lowest priority for both sides and can be eliminated.

Part 2: Caucus Session



5 minutes

- The People and the Leaders of each group meet separately in caucus, review the six remaining demands, and see which ones they would be willing to give up.
- The Mediators meet to look for possible trade-offs with the remaining six demands for both sides (explained on their sheet).

Part 3: Final Round of Negotiations



20 minutes

- The People and Leaders meet with the Mediators.
- The People make their final offer of their top six demands.
- The Leaders make their final offer of their top six demands.
- The Mediators work with groups to identify any demands either side would be willing to give up, or if either side has proposals to modify any of the demands.

10 minutes



Whole class

Debrief

Option A

Debrief the entire class by asking the Mediators to report their group's results back to the class. Point out which demands were important to both sides at the beginning and note any differences the negotiating groups had. Review the list of demands the sides agreed upon and the categories. Did students representing the People preserve their rights? Do they feel they have a good balance between rights and order and essential services? If they could change anything, what would it be?

Assessment: Have Mediators turn in their reports for assessment. Have the students in the two negotiating groups write a paragraph on whether they feel this process of negotiating differences offers a good method for arriving at a compromise, and why.

Option B

Debrief the class with Option A questions above.

Assessment: Have the Mediators turn in their reports and write a paragraph on the result of the negotiation session, what they would have done differently if they had been negotiating either as a Leader or a member of the People, and why this would have been more effective. Have the students from the two negotiating teams individually write an essay on whether their final agreement had a good balance between protecting their rights and maintaining order and essential services, and why. If they could change anything, what would it be?

Checklist

Make sure the Mediators' essays include the following:

- All parts of the Mediator's form completed
- A summary of the results of the negotiation session
- What they would have done differently had they been either a Leader or one of the People, and why they believe this approach would have been more effective

Make sure the negotiating team members' essays include the following:

- An analysis summarizing the results of their negotiation session
- An explanation of whether they believe the final agreement was a good balance between protecting their rights and maintaining order and essential services
- Reasons to support their conclusions
- Recommendations for change, if appropriate, or reasons for no change needed

Roots and Principles of American Democracy

Historical Background Essay

American democracy has deep roots in British history. The people who would eventually write the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution drew heavily from English government to form the structure and operation of the American government. During the Middle Ages, English society operated under a system of **feudalism**. Feudalism was structured like a pyramid, with the monarchy at the top controlling all the land, resources, and the military. In the middle were the lords or barons, people with large landholdings and small armies. At the bottom of the pyramid were the peasants.

Since the country was large, the lords helped the monarch rule the population. They pledged their loyalty and service to the monarch and agreed to help defend the country. In exchange, they received portions of land and the support of the monarch to control it. Over time, this group managed to establish certain rights related to their lives and property. The protection of these rights was considered the “**common law**.” The monarch’s and the lords’ armies protected the peasants and allowed them to live on the land to grow food. In exchange, the peasants proclaimed their total loyalty—along with money and/or a portion of their crops—to their lord and their monarch. However, the peasants had no armies, no land, and no claim to any rights.

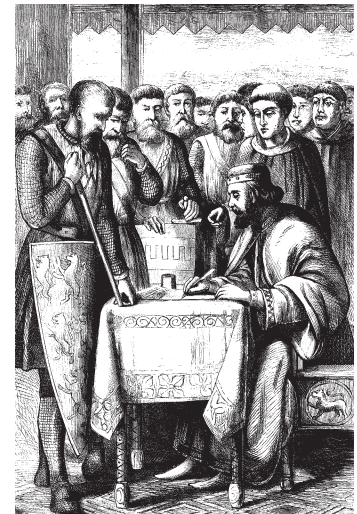
Feudalism worked well, as long as all sides followed the rules. It was generally believed that such a system kept order, provided the essential services needed to survive, and, in the case of the lords, established certain rights. Most monarchs and lords exercised their power with impunity, feeling that a firm hand would help them carry out their responsibilities more easily. However, as a result, the peasants often were abused for the sake of expediency.

Occasionally, monarchs would abuse the rights of their lords. In the early 13th century, England’s lords were displeased with their monarch King John because they felt he had wronged them. Unlike the peasants of England, who had little or no power, the lords had substantial power to force the king into an agreement. King John needed funds to fight wars in France, funds that came from taxes gathered by the lords. They threatened to withhold those funds unless the king agreed to honor their rights. When he tried to collect the taxes himself, they threatened rebellion. Reluctantly, he submitted to an agreement.

In 1215, King John signed the **Magna Carta** (meaning “Great Charter”) which articulated the rights of the lords and limited the power of the monarch:

No taxes could be imposed without consent of the council of lords. The monarch could not seize property without paying a fair price for it. People arrested could not be put in jail without a trial. The punishment for violating the law had to be in line

with the offense. The monarch could not take people’s property without fair compensation. From the Magna Carta came a several fundamental principles which the framers of the U.S. government incorporated, such as the **rule of law**, which established that no one was above the law, not even a monarch. Another concept was the value of a written charter, or a **constitution**, which outlined the rights of citizens and responsibilities of government.



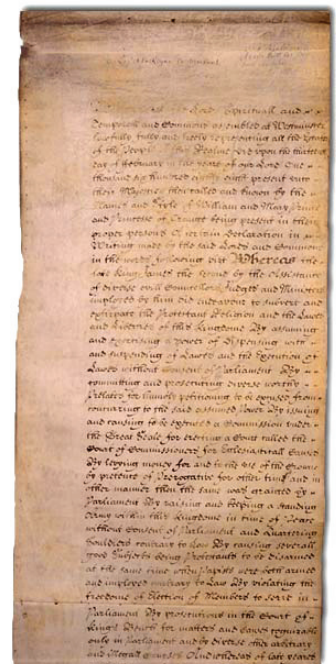
After the Magna Carta, the lords of England formed **Parliament**, which became a law-making body to help the monarch run the country. During the 15th and 16th centuries, as the Renaissance spread throughout Europe, new technologies helped the peasants become more self-sufficient and less dependent on the monarch and lords to provide food and protection. Gradually, they were able to negotiate with the king and lords and demand that their rights be honored too. The system of feudalism diminished and common people were allowed more participation in the government. Parliament, now composed both of lords and common people, made sure the monarch obeyed the traditional laws that honored citizens' rights.

In 1628, Parliament encountered another monarch who they felt abused citizens' rights. King Charles I, like his father James I, believed in **divine right**, the idea that a monarch's power came from God, granting absolute, unlimited authority. King Charles believed he was given this high level of authority in order to rule the kingdom effectively. As a result, he took actions that violated the rights established in the Magna Carta. Like King John, Charles needed funds to wage wars and protect the country; Parliament controlled the government's funds. If the king wanted his money, he would have to honor citizens' rights. To ensure that he did, Parliament forced the king to agree to the **Petition of Right**, which limited the power of the king by asking, and not demanding, that he honor the rights stated in the Magna Carta. The king could not tax without consent nor imprison people without a trial. In addition, the Petition of Right stated that the king couldn't house soldiers in people's homes without their consent or declare **martial law** when there was no war or danger to the kingdom. The Petition of Right taught the framers of the U.S. government about the principle of **limited government**, affirming that the king's power was not absolute.

King Charles followed the Petition of Right for a while, but later resumed his abuse of

authority after he had received his funds from Parliament. By 1648, Parliament had had enough, and civil war broke out. The army Parliament raised defeated the king's forces and arrested him. He was tried, sentenced to death, and executed in 1649. Parliament proved once and for all that a king's power wasn't absolute. The people could stop a monarch from abusing their rights and, if necessary, end that monarch's rule. After a period of civilian rule, Parliament reinstated the monarchy under King Charles's son Charles II in 1660.

James II, Charles's younger brother, succeeded him and proclaimed his authority under the doctrine of divine right. Parliament acted quickly: It expelled the king to France and established a new monarchy under William and Mary of the Netherlands, who were next in the line of succession to the English throne. However, this time Parliament imposed conditions, issuing the **English Bill of Rights**, which established the power of Parliament over the monarchy. The document stated the monarch could not suspend laws without Parliament's consent. Freedom of speech was protected during sessions of Parliament, which would be held frequently. English citizens would have the right to **petition**, or appeal to the government, and could elect their representatives to Parliament. The English Bill of Rights also prohibited the monarch from maintaining an army during peacetime without Parliament's consent. In all, the document required the monarch uphold the **individual rights** of English citizens.



Name: _____ Date: _____

Graphic Organizer: Roots of American Democracy Background Essay

Below are the three main documents that make up Britain's constitution. In the appropriate boxes, identify the restrictions on the power of the monarch.

| Restrictions on the power of the monarch | |
|--|--|
| English document | |
| Magna Carta | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. |
| Petition of Right | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. |
| English Bill of Rights | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. |

Mediator's Instructions

Mediation Activity

You have been called upon to mediate the dispute between the Leaders and the People. As a Mediator, your task is to get the two sides to come to an agreement that will settle their dispute and allow the country to retain its peace and stability. Periodically, remind both sides that these negotiations are important and that both sides have much to gain if they can reach a settlement, as well as a lot to lose if they can't.

Before the negotiations begin, both sides will meet separately to prioritize their demands. While they do this, review both lists of demands to become familiar with each side's positions and to understand their circumstances. Look for demands on both sides that are similar or conflicting, as well as for any demands that might be modified or rewritten to partially meet the needs of both sides. Remember, as a Mediator you should suggest, not dictate, areas of agreement. Listen carefully to the reasons each side gives for its position and try to suggest alternatives that each side might agree to. Record the proceedings on the "Mediator's Report" page.

Negotiations Format

Part 1: The Negotiation Begins (10 minutes)

- The People's representatives will present first, stating their nine demands. The Leaders' representatives will listen and not interrupt. You may take notes indicating which demands are most important to the People.
- Next, the Leaders' representatives will present their demands. The People's representatives will listen and not interrupt.
- You will then review each group's demands and help eliminate the lowest-priority demands on both sides.

Part 2: Caucus Session (5 minutes)

- Each side will meet away from the negotiation table, review the six remaining demands, and identify which, if any, they are willing to give up completely or partially. While they meet, look for demands that can be modified to meet some of each side's demands without forcing either to give up all their power.

Part 3: Final Round of Negotiations (20 minutes)

- The People present their final six demands.
- The Leaders present final six demands.
- Ask both groups if there are any demands either side would be willing to give up, or if either side has a proposal to modify any of the demands.
- Try to help the two sides to come to a final agreement either on all demands made and/or modifications of demands. Identify any demands still not agreed upon (if any) and the reasons why.

Debriefing Session

- Report on the results of the negotiations, explaining which demands the two sides were able to agree to and the reasons why. Use the "Mediator's Report" form to record the proceedings and results.
- The teacher will debrief the class with questions.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Mediator's Report

Top three demands the Leaders thought most important:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Top three demands the People thought most important:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List the demands the two sides agreed upon and indicate whether the demands were for attaining order (AO), essential services (ES), or rights (R).

| Demands Agreed Upon | Category (AO, ES, or R) |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

Why did the two sides agree to these demands?