

3.10 POWERS OF GOVERNMENTS

Essential Question(s): Which form of government has the most power? What are the differences in power between each form of government? Which form of government has the most power to address equity and social justice issues?

Overview

Aside from the separation of powers at the federal level, the U.S. Constitution also describes the power relationships between state and federal governments, how that power will be distributed, and the relationships between the states themselves. Local governments (municipalities in a city, town, county, village or borough) are granted their powers by the state and these powers vary from state to state.

In addition, there are stipulations between the U.S. federal government and indigenous Native American tribes. Federally recognized tribes have sovereignty, meaning that tribal nations have the power to govern themselves and are considered independent sovereign nations apart from local, state or federal government. Just as the federal government relates to states as governments, it also deals with federally recognized tribes as governments, not as special interest groups, individuals or some other type of non-governmental entity.

Snapshot

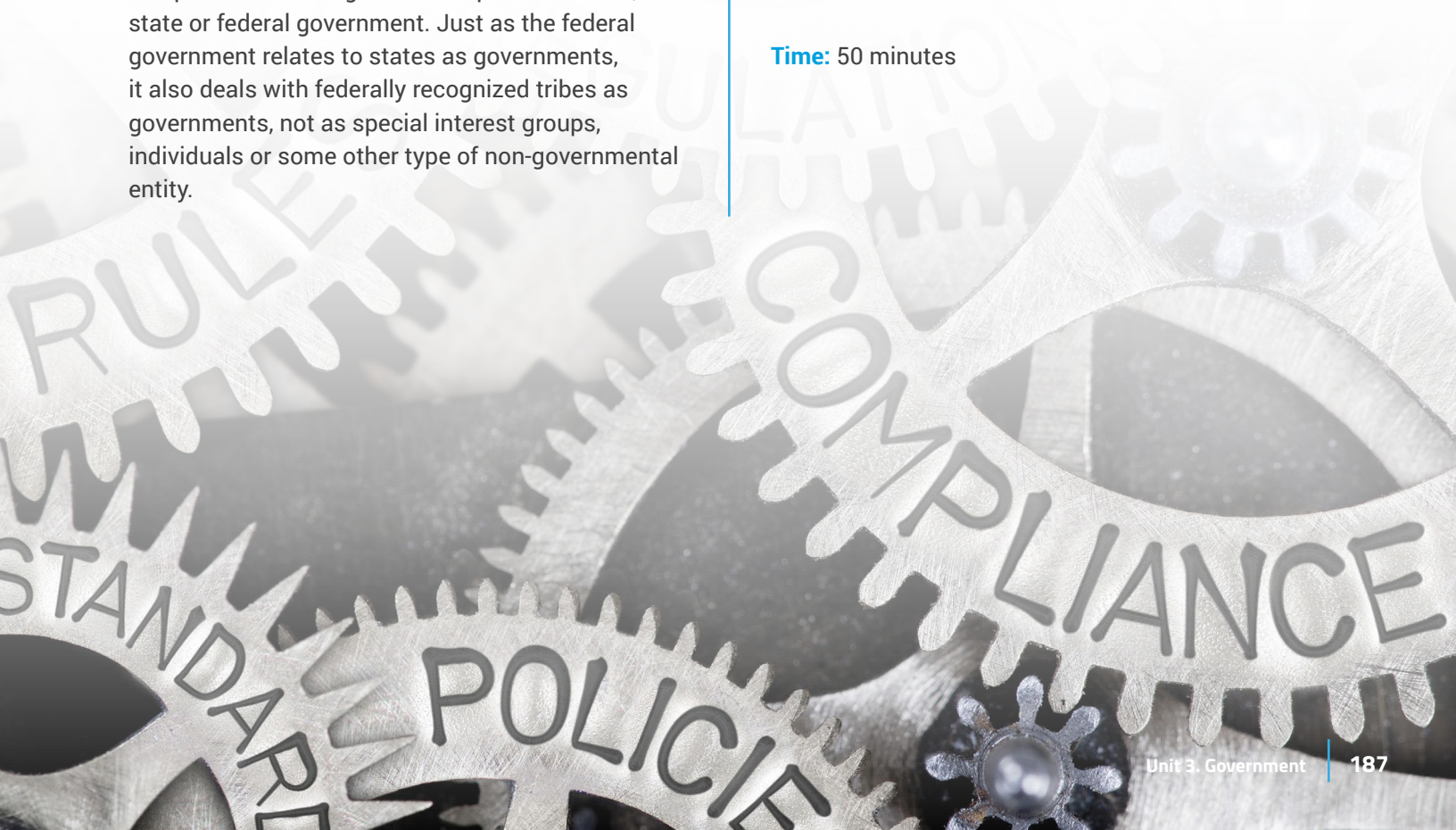
What Students Will Learn:

In this lesson, students compare the kinds of power given to each form of government, the dependencies and relationships between the various levels of government, and where there is shared oversight. Besides understanding these structures and assigned powers, students will consider which form of government has the most power to address issues, including those of equity and social justice, in their communities and lives. This exploration encourages students to think critically about how and why power was allocated, and how it affects them and issues they care about.

Standard(s):

D2.Civ.1.9-12

Time: 50 minutes



Objectives

- Differentiate the powers held by each level of government.
- Explain which level of government has the most power in the lives of people in the United States.

Differentiation

Students are working in small groups. Consider creating the groups in advance.

What's Needed

- Writing utensil and paper or 1:1 technology
- Four large sheets of chart paper and markers or online tools that allow students to add comments in four categories (e.g., discussion boards)
- Make copies of the handouts, “[Powers of Governments Diagram](#)” and “[Who Has the Power Worksheet](#),” one of each for each student.

Classroom Setup

This is a carousel activity. Before class begins, write the following labels at the top of four separate sheets of large chart paper: Federal, State, Local and Tribal. Post the chart papers around the room and provide markers for students to add comments to each sheet. (See step #5.)

Direct Teaching

1. Welcome students to class. As a warm up, ask students to vote on the following question:
Based on your knowledge and experience, which has the most power? Federal, State, Local or Tribal governments?
2. Have a few students share their explanation for why they voted the way they did.
Note: Some students may have background knowledge of the ‘supremacy clause’ of the U.S. Constitution, which states that the federal Constitution and laws take precedence over state laws. That said, listen to students’ arguments about why state and/or local governments have more or less power.
3. Share with students that they are going to examine the differences in power between these forms of government: federal, state, local and tribal.
4. Distribute the handouts, “[Powers of Governments Diagram](#)” and “[Who Has the Power Worksheet](#),” to each student. Explain that they will be getting into small groups to collaborate on analyzing and responding to questions about the power of different forms of government.

Key Vocabulary

federal government
local government
oversee
power
state government
tribal government



5. Divide students into four small groups and assign each group to one of the large sheets of chart paper hanging around the room. Instruct them to move to their assigned paper.

Note: Try to maintain groups of 3–5 students. If the class is larger, consider having two copies of each set of chart papers, to maintain smaller group size.

6. Once the groups are at their assigned chart paper, tell them this is a carousel activity and explain the process as follows:
 - a. Each group will spend 3–4 minutes (timed, and adjust for more if it's needed) at each chart paper which represents a form of government. You will be notified when one minute is left, and then when time is up and your group is to move to the next paper.
 - b. For each form of government on the chart paper, reference your “Powers of Governments” handout and other knowledge you may have previously learned about these forms of governments and respond to the question, “How do I see the powers of this form of government impact my life and my community?” You can respond on the chart paper with words, bullet point phrases or drawings.
 - c. You will rotate around the room until every group has had a chance to comment on the impact of the powers allocated to each form of government.
 - d. As you walk about and read each chart paper, pay attention to common themes and unique comments and take notes on your “Who Has the Power Worksheet.”

7. Have students begin the carousel activity starting with their assigned chart paper.

8. After the carousel activity, ask students to discuss the following questions in their small groups:

What is ‘power’? What is ‘power’ in government?

Have a few groups share their answer.

9. Share with students the following definitions:

Injustice: A situation in which the rights of a person or a group of people are ignored or disrespected. (Example: Many streets and buildings in a community are not accessible for people who use wheelchairs.)

Equality: Everyone having the same rights, opportunities and resources. Equality stresses fairness and parity in having access to social goods and services.

Equity: Everyone getting what they need in order to have access, opportunities and a fair chance to succeed. It recognizes that the same for everyone (equality) doesn't truly address needs and therefore, specific solutions and remedies, which may be different, are necessary.

10. Tell groups, keeping these definitions in mind and referencing the “Powers of Governments,” discuss and answer these questions:

- If you saw an unjust or unfair situation, such as mistreatment of a group of people, which form(s) of government has the most power to address this concern?
- If you saw a situation of inequity or an unfair way resources are provided in your community, which form(s) of government has the most power to address this concern?

Instruct students to record their answers on their “Who Has the Power Worksheet.” Allow 10 minutes for this activity.

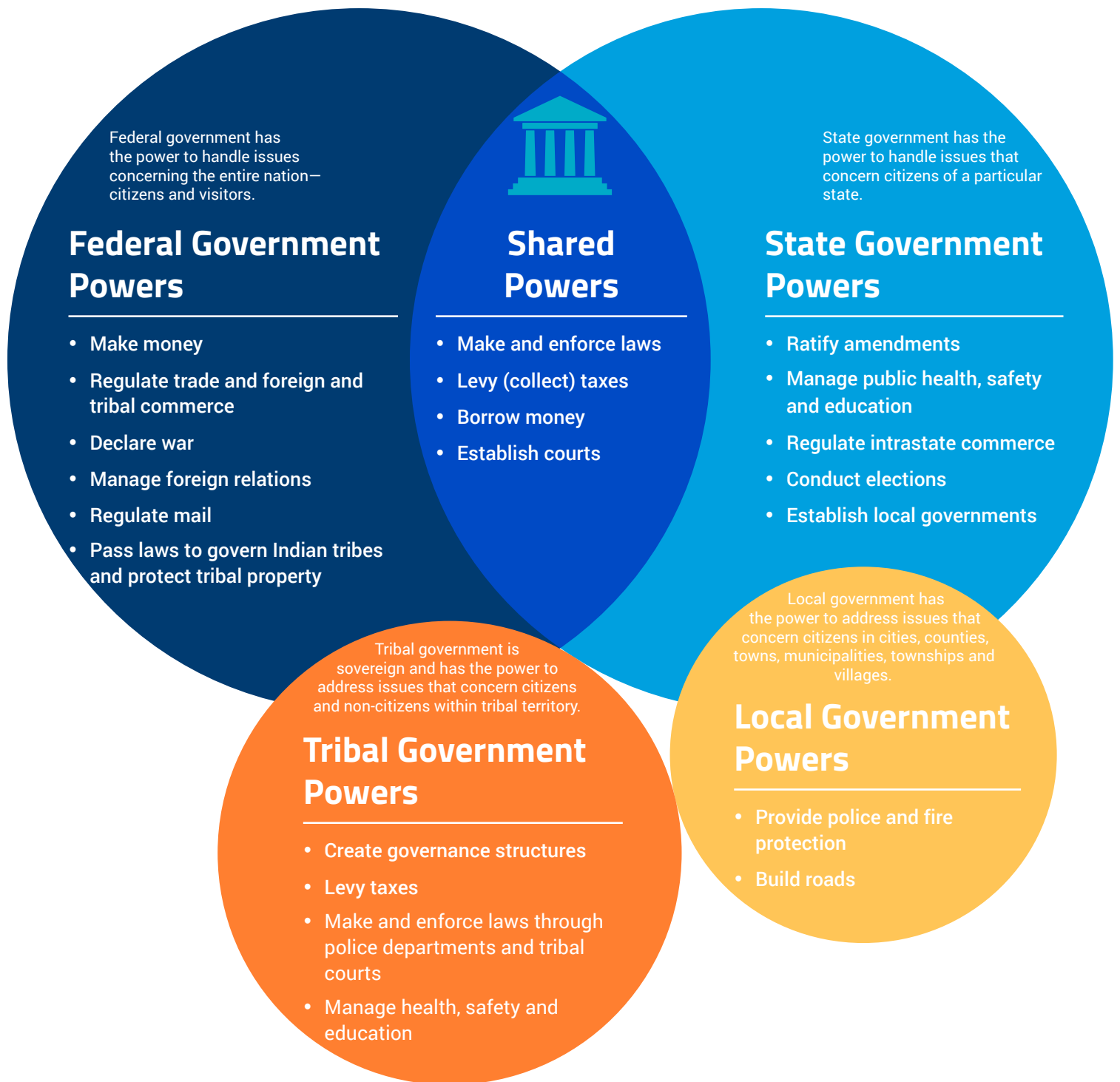
11. Facilitate a discussion around these questions:

- What are the main differences in power between Federal, State, Local and Tribal governments? Why do you think our government was set up this way?
- Which form of government has the most power over the people in the United States? Is it fair?
- Which form of government is most accessible and works most directly with its people

Closing

Have students share one thing that surprised or intrigued them today.

POWERS OF GOVERNMENTS DIAGRAM



WHO HAS THE POWER WORKSHEET

Impact of Powers

Directions: As you move to each form of government during the carousel activity, jot down common themes and unique comments you see posted and take notes as you answer the following question for each form of government: *How do I see the powers of this form of government impact my life and my community?*

Federal Government	State Government
Local Government	Tribal Government

Which Government Has the Power?

Directions: Keeping in mind the definitions below and referencing the “Powers of Governments,” discuss and answer the following questions.

1. If you saw an unjust or unfair situation, such as mistreatment of a group of people, which form(s) of government has the most power to address this concern?

2. If you saw a situation of inequity or an unfair way resources are provided in your community, which form(s) of government has the most power to address this concern?

Injustice: A situation in which the rights of a person or a group of people are ignored or disrespected. (*Example: Many streets and buildings in a community are not accessible for people who use wheelchairs.*)

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