

# 3.1 GOVERNMENT 101: WHAT IS A GOVERNMENT?

**Essential Question(s):** What is a government? What are different forms of government? What is my relationship to government?

## Overview

Governments, and the act of governing, have been part of human society for thousands of years. Governments have shifted and changed in the way they represent, operate and control, but one thing remains the same: they are created to organize groups of people and provide structure and accountability. Understanding the concept of government is vital for understanding how the world functions.

## Snapshot

### What Students Will Learn:

In this lesson, students will collaborate in small groups to create a silent scene that depicts one form of government. They will need to use their prior knowledge, creativity and imagination to help their classmates understand multiple forms of government.

### Standard(s):

D2.Civ.5.2-5  
D2.Civ.5.9-12

**Time:** 50 minutes





## Key Vocabulary

authoritarianism  
democracy  
dictatorship  
government  
monarchy  
oligarchy  
totalitarianism

## Objectives

- Describe government.
- Explain different forms of government.
- Explain their relationship to government.

## Differentiation

Students will work in small groups. Consider assigning groups before class.

## What's Needed

- Writing utensil or 1:1 technology
- (Optional) Props for silent scene (hats, crowns, robes, gloves, etc.)
- Make a copy of the “Forms of Government Cards” and cut into individual cards.
- Make copies of the “Forms of Government Group Sheet,” one for each student.

## Classroom Setup

Students will work in small groups and present in front of their peers. Arrange desks so that group collaboration and viewing of a large space is easily accessible.

## Direct Teaching

1. Once students enter class, have them write down an answer to this question: “What is the purpose of government?”  
**Note:** Consider having them write their answers on a poster, sticky note or board/smart board.
2. Facilitate a brief discussion about government, highlighting that governments differ in how they:
  - Keep order by creating and enforcing laws.
  - Defend against enemies.
  - Manage the economy (finances).
  - Collect taxes, share income and resources.
  - Provide public goods and services.
  - Provide safety and protection of its people.
  - Prevent inhabitants from being harmed by outside sources.
  - Manage relations with other countries and governments.

3. Explain to students that there are many forms of government. Today, they will focus on six.
4. Place students into small groups of six and give each group a “Forms of Government Cards” and distribute to each student the “Forms of Government Group Sheet.” Instruct the groups to create a silent scene that depicts the form of government they were given. They cannot say anything, write anything, or signal anything during the performance of their scene.
5. Explain to students that while they are coming up with their silent scenes, they should be thinking about how to illustrate a way in which this form of government relates to students’ lives. Provide 10 minutes of work time for students.
6. Have groups present their silent scenes one at a time. While they present, the seated groups should write down on the “Forms of Government Group Sheet” what they believe that form of government requires from its leaders and its people. Following each silent scene, ask for one or two different students to share what form of government they thought it was, and why. Then have the performing group share their form of government. For example: *Our silent scene is about democracy.* Allow 10–15 minutes for this entire process.
7. Have students reflect on the various forms of government and write a one-answer response to the question, “What is my relationship to government?” While students may not have a direct relationship to oligarchy or dictatorship, the U.S. government does. Understanding their current relationship and role is vital to understanding how the U.S. government operates.
8. Ask for a volunteer from each group, representing each of the forms of government, to share their one-answer response aloud. Then, facilitate a brief discussion based on the groups’ responses. Questions can include:
  - What did you come up with and why?
  - How do you currently relate to government?
  - How do you want to relate to government?

If students struggle to identify a relationship to one of the forms of government, share examples from your own knowledge. Students should conclude that they are active participants in government.

## Closing

Ask students to expand their answer to the question, “What is my relationship to government?” and/or ask students to write down 1–2 questions they have about any form of government.

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## Extension Activities

- Have students further research the forms of government discussed in the lesson and also include in their research the following: Communism, Theocracy, Capitalism, Socialism and Tribalism. Have them write a research paper that documents the description of each form of government, including who makes up the government, how that government affects the people, and where that type of government exists in the world.
- Have students write a short essay answering these questions: “How does government affect me? How do I participate in and influence government?” You can have students share their essays in class.

# FORMS OF GOVERNMENT CARDS

<p><b>Monarchy</b></p> <p>A king or queen is Head of State. Rule is held by one person.</p>	<p><b>Oligarchy</b></p> <p>A small group is in control, usually for selfish reasons.</p>
<p><b>Totalitarianism</b></p> <p>One elite person has complete control over everyone else in all aspects of their lives.</p>	<p><b>Democracy</b></p> <p>Power is within the majority of people.</p>
<p><b>Dictatorship</b></p> <p>Absolute power is given to one person who disperses control.</p>	<p><b>Authoritarianism</b></p> <p>All political power is from an individual or small group, but allows others to live their life as they want.</p>

# FORMS OF GOVERNMENT GROUP SHEET

**Directions:** While groups present their silent scene, create a definition for the form of government that they are representing and include what that form of government requires from its leaders and its people.

Not sure where to begin? Look at the beginning of each word for a clue!

Government	Definition
Monarchy	
Oligarchy	
Democracy	

Government	Definition
Totalitarianism	
Dictatorship	
Authoritarianism	