



## Lesson 6.2 “The Ideas of Our Government”

### Unit 6: Establishing Government

#### Lesson Objectives

- Students will discuss the purposes of government.
- Students will complete activities to investigate the foundational ideas of U.S. governments.
- Students will synthesize knowledge of foundational ideas through a thinking routine.
- Students will reflect as a class how foundational ideas are seen in history and in the modern day.

#### Lesson Competencies

- I can initiate and sustain a focused discussion. (ELA 7)
- I can locate, organize, and analyze information from print and non-print sources to support my development of central ideas and subtopics. (ELA 8)
- I can locate relevant key ideas using text features, including visual and graphic information, to make connections within or across sources and explain how various parts of information contribute to overall meaning. (ELA 3)
- I can integrate information, distinguish relevant-irrelevant information (e.g., fact/opinion), and (visually, orally, in writing) present what was learned. (ELA 8)

#### Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire come to be the way it is?  
How has New Hampshire been shaped by many voices?

#### Focus Questions

What are the foundational principles of our government?

#### Estimated Time

Five or six 40-minute class sessions

#### Materials & Equipment

Class set of Government Ideas 1–5 student worksheets  
Materials for Government Ideas 1, 3, 4, 5  
Class set of 5 Government Ideas “Compass Point” worksheets  
Mind maps of big idea questions, as desired  
“Chart of Historic and Modern-day Examples” as chosen by educator



## Educator Introduction & Rationale

Although the fundamental principles that our government is based on are abstract and the source of debate among political scientists, elementary students benefit from a basic introduction to these ideas as a basis for future learning. Civics education is not only crucial to being a good citizen but also sidelined in many classrooms today. This lesson can serve as the first exposure for students to the fundamental ideas of our government.

While states had some guidance from the colonial governments they were replacing, the Founding Fathers had the opportunity to create a new national government themselves. No other country in the developed world was governed collectively by the people at this time. What sort of government should they create? While political philosophers had been pondering for centuries how a government could both serve and protect the liberty and prosperity of the people, the creation of the United States was an opportunity to put political theories to the test and develop new approaches to the relationship between the people and the government.

In general, Americans held to some fundamental principles when it came to governance:

- **Social Contract:** that the people and their rulers enter into a social contract of mutual responsibilities;
- **Common Good:** that governments are established to balance community and individual needs but that balance usually tips in the direction of the common good;
- **Representative Democracy:** that representative democracy provides the best means to be responsive to the will of the people while moderating their passions;
- **Rule of Law:** that America is governed by the rule of law and no one is above the law; and
- **Limited Government:** that limited government offers the best chance to curb government abuses through the separation of powers and the use of checks and balances.

Please see the Educator Overview for more information.

This is the second lesson in Unit 6: Establishing Government and can stand alone from the unit. In this lesson, students consider what life would be like with no government, then complete five sets of Government Ideas activities to learn about the fundamental principles that underlie the government of the United States. These activities can be set up throughout the classroom to be done in groups as stations or investigated one by one as a whole class. They are designed to engage students in creative ways with these fundamental ideas. Students then process the knowledge using the Harvard Graduate School of Education Project Zero's Thinking Routine "Compass Points." After completing a compass for each Government Idea, students discuss how these principles are seen in historical and modern-day scenarios. Please adapt all the material in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom. Please note, lesson vocabulary and definitions are at the end of the document. You may wish to preview these with your students.

A reinforcement is available to help cement students' understanding of the concepts. Extensions are available if students are ready to consider how the principles overlap or to apply principles in modern-day scenarios.

# Learning Activity

## Activation

**What would life be like without government?** Project or write the brainstorm question for students. Give one or two minutes for them to think or write individually, then have them turn and talk with a neighbor. Discuss as a class and create a well-rounded discussion.

**Possible responses:**

- There would be no one to make people obey laws. There would be lots of crime.
- Money wouldn't mean anything. Supplies and food would be what people cared about.
- People would be freer. Life would be more fun.
- Everyone would have more guns and be fighting all the time to protect their property and family.
- People would get along better without lots of politicians and police.
- Armies from other countries could take over the country.
- Poor people, old people, and sick people who couldn't take care of themselves would starve.
- Schools and libraries, police and fire departments might close.
- The bullies might rule everyone else.
- Everyone would be free to do whatever they wanted.

## Guided Practice

**Fundamental ideas of our government.** While some aspects of no government might be fun, use the discussion to show students we need government. Given that, what ideas should help form the government? Give students time to turn-and-talk or brainstorm individually to help them engage with the topic.

Decide for your class if you will complete each Government Idea activity together as a class or if the class will complete them in small groups. Preview the activities; some are more complex and have abstract ideas students may need assistance understanding. Each Government Idea has an activity and questions to process the information.

Give students the worksheet packet "The Ideas of Our Government." Explain that students will use these activities to examine the ideas the Founding Fathers thought were important to serve as the basis for our government.

Circulate to support learning; ensure students are finding evidence and explaining their reasoning. Give students appropriate time to process each Government Idea. Pause the lesson as necessary for your class.



Government Idea	Activity & Notes	Big Question
<b>1. Social Contract</b>	Skit with four parts and questions; students should pre-read lines	Why do we need government?
<b>2. Common Good</b>	"Would you rather?" examples and questions	How can we balance the needs of the community and the needs of individuals? What do we do if they conflict?
<b>3. Rule of Law</b>	Read summary of character views then improv dialogue in character and questions; names are fictitious, must cut out cards	Why does everyone have to follow the same laws?
<b>4. Representative democracy</b>	Cartoon and questions	How should many people make decisions together?
<b>5. Limited government</b>	Information on dictators, graphic, "Wacky Words" game and questions	Why should we limit government's powers?

**Independent Practice**

**Compass Points.** Students can complete the Compass Points worksheets to synthesize the information for each Government Idea as they finish the activities or once all are complete. They should complete these worksheets in pairs or small groups. Compass Points worksheets can also be used for reflection if time does not permit a separate reflection activity.

**Reflection**

**Historic and modern-day examples.** After moving through the Government Ideas and completing the Compass Points thinking routine for each station, consider whether your students are ready to apply their knowledge through discussion of historic and modern-day examples of each of the ideas of government.

**Teaching tip:** If your students need more time processing the broad ideas of the lesson, complete class mind maps of each big question. Students can circulate around the classroom with their notes and write on large chart paper or use their notes to participate in a class discussion on the questions. Review each of the mind maps together.

Choose for your class which chart will be best for your discussion on historic and modern-day examples of the ideas of government.

Available charts:

- Blank chart with spaces for student ideas
- Chart with historic ideas completed and space for student thoughts on modern-day ideas
- Chart with both historic and modern-day ideas completed

Complete and review charts as best for your class, then discuss together.

## Reinforcement

1. **Anchor Chart.** An Anchor Chart is an easily accessible poster of the most relevant concepts and strategies of particular content. Students make an Anchor Chart for the classroom titled “Ideas of Government” and post in the classroom. Include the five Ideas of Government, what each means, and one example of each.

## Extension

1. **Overlapping principles.** Return to the Government Ideas activities and challenge students to find other ideas of government in the activities rather than just the one specifically included. For instance, in the Government Idea 1: Social Contract skit, the neighbors work together for the common good. Or, in Government Idea 3: The Rule of Law character cards, the American characters are arguing for limited government. Challenge students to find as many ideas of government in the activities as they can. Alternatively, invite students to write a skit or draw a cartoon to demonstrate various ideas of government.
2. **What principles apply?** Use the “Which Ideas of Government?” worksheet to help students practice applying multiple principles of government to modern-day issues.



## Supporting Materials

- Lorenca Consuelo Rosal, *The Liberty Key: The Story of the New Hampshire Constitution* (1986). Inspiration for "The Tree of Liberty" infographic and Limited Government station.
- Project Zero's Thinking Routine Toolbox is an excellent resource for all teachers. Adapted in this lesson was "Compass Points" found at [pz.harvard.edu/resources/compass-points](https://pz.harvard.edu/resources/compass-points). We highly recommend looking through all the thinking routines available at [pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines](https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines).



## Standards

### “Moose on the Loose” Content:

- ✓ Students will understand that growing conflicts between England and the 13 colonies over issues of political and economic rights led to the American Revolution. They will understand that people in New Hampshire played a part in both sides of the revolution. (3-5.T3.1)
- ✓ Students will understand that after the revolution, the United States of America established a federal government; colonies established state governments. They will understand that the New Hampshire State Constitution established the basic structure of government for the state and created laws to protect the people and interests of the state. (3-5.T3.2)

### “Moose on the Loose” Skills:

- ✓ Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions (3-5.S2.2)
- ✓ Effective Historical Thinking (3-5.S3.1, 3-5.S3.2)
- ✓ Understanding and Participating in Government (3-5.S6.1, 3-5.S6.2)

### New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: The Nature and Purpose of Government (SS:CV:4:1.1)
- ✓ Civics and Governments: Structure and Function of United States and New Hampshire Government (SS:CV:4:2.1)
- ✓ Civics and Governments: The World and the United States' Place In It (SS:CV:4:3.1)
- ✓ US / NH History: Political Foundations and Development (SS:HI:4:1.2)
- ✓ World History: Political Foundations and Developments (SS:WH:4:1.1)

### NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- ✓ Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ✓ Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance
- ✓ Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

### C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Construction Compelling Questions (D1.1.3-5, D1.2.3-5)
- ✓ Determining Helpful Sources (D1.5.3-5)
- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.2.3-5, D2.Civ.3.3-5, D2.Civ.4.3-5, D2.Civ.5.3-5, D2.Civ.6.3-5)
- ✓ Participation and Deliberation (D2.Civ.8.3-5, D2.Civ.10.3-5)
- ✓ Developing Claims and Using Evidence (D3.3.3-5, D3.4.3-5)
- ✓ Communicating Conclusions (D4.1.3-5, D4.2.3-5)

## Common Core ELA:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Literature (RL.4.2)
- ✓ Craft and Structure in Reading Literature (RL.4.4)
- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Informational Text (RI.4.1, RI.4.2)
- ✓ Craft and Structure in Informational Text (RI.4.4, RI.4.5)
- ✓ Integration of Knowledge and Ideas in Informational Text (RI.4.7)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Informational Text (RI.4.10)
- ✓ Production and Distribution of Writing (W.4.4)
- ✓ Research to Build and Present Knowledge (W.4.8, W.4.9)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.4.1, SL.4.1c, SL.4.1d, SL.4.2)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.4.4, L.4.4a)



## Lesson Vocabulary

<b>common good</b>	(noun) A phrase in the preamble of the Constitution; what is best for the community
<b>constitution</b>	(noun) A document laying out the rules for how a government will work
<b>dictator</b>	(noun) The ruler of a nation or people who has absolute power
<b>executive</b>	(adjective) Describing the person or branch of government who puts plans and laws into effect
<b>executive branch</b>	(noun) The section of government that puts plans and laws into effect
<b>federal</b>	(adjective) The central government of a group of states; the U.S. federal government is in Washington, D.C.
<b>federalism</b>	(adjective) When local towns, states, and the federal government share power together
<b>foundational principle</b>	(noun) An idea on which something stands; one foundational principle of the United States is the rule of law
<b>fundamental</b>	(adjective) Describing something that is central in importance
<b>government</b>	(noun) A group of people that have the power to make and carry out laws for a community
<b>judicial</b>	(adjective) Describing the people or branch of government that decides if laws are fair
<b>legislative</b>	(adjective) Describing the people or branch of government that makes laws
<b>limited government</b>	(noun) When the power of the people who rule a community is controlled so that no person or group gets too much power
<b>representative democracy</b>	(noun) When a group of people select someone to communicate their views and make laws for them
<b>rule of law</b>	(noun) The idea that everyone in a community agrees to a set of written rules and then everyone follows the same rules
<b>social contract</b>	(noun) An agreement between people and their government to give up some rights in exchange for security and law and order