



Lesson 18.6 “Balance of Power Writing Assessment”

Unit 18: Civics and Government Today

Lesson Objectives

- Students will brainstorm to apply the idea of a balance of power to their lives.
- Students will fill out graphics that demonstrate a balance of power in government today.
- Students will write and edit a multi-paragraph essay describing a balance of power in government today.

Lesson Competencies

- I can initiate and sustain a focused discussion. (ELA 7)
- I can identify, explain, and analyze the core civic practices and foundational principles that guide governments and communities. (Moose SS)
- I can organize my ideas and details into paragraphs and sections, using linking words and phrases to convey meaning. (ELA 5)
- With support, I can edit and revise my text for clarity, focus, and coherence (e.g., using grade-appropriate mechanics, grammar, language, sentence types, description/elaboration, and relevant visuals). (ELA 5)

Essential Questions

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

Focus Questions

How is a balance of power part of our democracy?

Estimated Time

Between four and six 40-minute class sessions

Materials & Equipment

Seesaw images for projection
Definition page for projection and/or posting
Class set of “Balance of Power Writing Assessment” with “Rubric for Balance of Power Essay” on the reverse
Class set of “Graphic Packet”
“Answer Key: Possible responses” for educator reference
Class set of “Writing Your Balance of Power Essay” packet



Educator Introduction & Rationale

A balance of power between different aspects of American government is crucial to the success of our democracy in order to limit government power and to ensure all voices are heard. The term “balance of power” usually refers to a balance between two nations, when neither can conquer the other nor wishes to back down, or the separation of powers set up in the U.S. Constitution between federal, state, and local governments or judicial, executive, and legislative branches. Maintaining these balances of power helps our democracy limit the power of the government while serving the interests of the citizens.

This lesson is the sixth in Unit 18: Civics and Government Today. This lesson cannot stand alone from the unit as students are applying knowledge previously learned. Please see the answer key in the “[Worksheets and Resources](#)” file for which lessons are necessary for each balance of power.

After brainstorming balances in their lives to activate their schema and become accustomed to the graphics, students apply their learning from the unit, complete graphics, and answer questions about their specific balance. These graphics are then turned into a rough draft on worksheets or typed, then students edit, peer and educator conference, and complete a final draft about a balance of power in government today. There are no separate reinforcement or extension activities in this lesson, as those goals can be met by revisiting important topics in the unit or extending the project with additional materials.

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.

Learning Activity

Activation & Discussion

Balance of power. Use a familiar idea to help students understand the concept of “balance of power.” Ask them one or more of the following questions:

- What happens if weather in New Hampshire is not balanced? What if it was sunny all the time or rainy all the time?
- What would happen if you exercised not at all? Or exercised all the time?
- What happens if you drank only soda? Or if you drank only water?
- What would happen if you never get to choose your working groups in school? Or always get to choose your working groups?

Project the tilted image of the seesaw and write one idea on the bottom and one on the top. Discuss with your class, exaggerating some of the effects. Project the reverse seesaw and discuss what happens if the opposite idea is on top, making clear how different it is from the first situation. Now project the balanced seesaw and discuss with your class how this incorporates the best of both situations. Note that there are positives and negatives to all three possibilities, but that a skewed balance is frequently a problem.

Direct Instruction & Discussion

Our government today. Review with students that balancing power in our government today is similar. There are a lot of different aspects that need to be balanced, and keeping the seesaw from tipping to one side or the other is an important part of governing the country. Project the definition of a balance of power and the general statement about why it is important to balance power in the country. Tell students that this is the big idea they will be investigating and writing about. What do they think? Do they agree or disagree? Can they think of any examples?

In this balance of power assessment essay, students will take what they have learned about civics and our government today and apply it. Distribute the “Balance of Power Writing Assessment” introduction with “Balance of Power Essay Rubric” on the back. Review as best for your class and aid students in choosing a power balance to investigate. Best practice is to help students envision what an “Above Standard” essay might look like, using the rubric and instructions.

Decide on and be very clear about intermediate due dates; posting them in an appropriate place in the classroom works well. Remind students that working on a piece of writing over time and coming back to it more than once helps them get perspective on and improve their writing. Editing and including peer/educator review is an essential part of the writing process.

Student Reading

Revisiting Federalism and branches of government. If students need to review the topics addressed by this assessment, direct them to Unit 18, Learn It! "[Federalism and the Federal Government](#)," pages 1-3 and pages 9-12.

Guided Practice

Completing the graphics. When students have decided on a topic, distribute the graphic packets. Note that there are different packets with triangles if students are investigating federalism or separation of powers as those topics have three aspects to balance.

Make student notes, class worksheets and answer keys, and the "Moose on the Loose" website available as students complete the graphics. Choose whether they will work in groups, whether they will complete the graphics in full sentences, and whether any work will be done at home. Allow students to work over several periods and provide support.

Independent Practice & Reflection

Drafting the essay. As students complete the graphic packets, make the "Writing Your Balance of Power Essay" packet available. Ensure that review of the graphic packets is part of the process so that as students write their rough drafts they work from solid information.

If possible, students should type the rough drafts so that editing is easier. Complete drafting as best for your class, including peer and educator conferences and rewrites. Have students use the questions on the drafting packet to help guide their paragraphs. Remind them as they write the paragraph that they have already answered these questions on the graphic packets! Writing an essay is hard, but scaffolding the process makes it accessible for all students.

Final drafts. Students should type final drafts so that they present a formal, finished piece of writing for the rubric. Have them self-grade before passing in the final draft with the rubric.

Consider creating a whole-class image of balances to showcase the learning students have done about supporting a strong democracy.

Reinforcement & Extension

Provided through differentiation of essay.



Standards

“Moose on the Loose” Content:

- ✓ 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)
- ✓ Students will understand that New Hampshire today is a modern, diverse state with a rich culture and thriving economy. (3-5.T8.1)

“Moose on the Loose” Skills:

- ✓ Gathering, Interpreting, and Using Evidence (3-5.S1.1)
- ✓ Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions (3-5.S2.1, 3-5.S2.2)
- ✓ 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)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance
- ✓ Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.2.3-5, D2.Civ.3.3-5, D2.Civ.5.3-5)
- ✓ Participation and Deliberation (D2.Civ.8.3-5)
- ✓ Gathering and Evaluating Sources (D3.1.3-5)

Common Core ELA:

- ✓ Text Types and Purposes in Writing (W.4.2, W.4.2b, W.4.2c, W.4.2d, W.4.2e)
- ✓ Production and Distribution of Writing (W.4.4, W.4.5)
- ✓ Range of Writing (W.4.10)
- ✓ Conventions of Standard English in Language (L.4.2, L.4.2a, L.4.2d)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.4.6)

Lesson Vocabulary

amend	(verb) To revise or change
amendment	(noun) An addition to an existing document; in the U.S. Constitution, the amendments come after the original document
bicameral	(noun) A legislature that has two parts; the U.S. Congress is bicameral because it has the House of Representatives and the Senate
bill	(noun) In government, a draft version of legislation that is under debate and not yet law
branch of government	(noun) A section of government with its own purpose; the U.S. government has three sections of the government with different responsibilities that support each other to create, examine, and enforce laws
check	(verb) In government, when one part of the government legally stops another part from taking its desired actions
checks and balances	(noun) The idea where separate parts of the government are given powers to stop each other's actions and are made to share power
citizen	(noun) A member by law of a nation or group
citizenship	(noun) The position of belonging to a nation or group by law
civic engagement	(noun) Actions taken to participate in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a community
constitution	(noun) A document laying out the rules for how a government will work
Constitution	(noun) The document that lays out the framework for how the federal government works; written in 1787 and ratified in 1789
democracy	(noun) A government ruled by majority vote of the people
executive	(adjective) Describing the person or branch of government who puts plans and laws into effect
executive branch	(noun) The section of government that puts plans and laws into effect
federal	(adjective) The central government of a group of states; the U.S. federal government is in Washington, D.C.
federalism	(adjective) When local towns, states, and the federal government share power together
General Court	(noun) The official name for the New Hampshire state legislature
good citizenship	(noun) Actions people take to appropriately behave as a member of a community, such as civic duty
government	(noun) A group of people that have the power to make and carry out laws for a community
governor	(noun) The leader of the executive branch of a state government
House of Representatives	(noun) One of two legislative chambers; usually larger than the Senate
judicial	(adjective) Describing the people or branch of government that decides if laws are fair
judicial branch	(noun) The section of government that decides if laws are fair
law	(noun) A rule that regulates the actions of members of a community
legislative	(adjective) Describing the people or branch of government that makes laws
legislative branch	(noun) The section of government that makes laws

legislator	(noun) A person elected to serve in either the House of Representatives or Senate
legislature	(noun) A group of people chosen or elected to make the laws for a colony or state
living document	(noun) A paper that is added to or changed through time
monarchy	(noun) A form of government led by a king, queen, or emperor who holds the leadership position for life
public service	(noun) Something that is supplied for the benefit of the people; examples of public services are police, libraries, school, roads, courts, and military
representative	(noun) The person selected by a group of people who will communicate their views and make laws for them
Senate	(noun) One of two legislative chambers; usually smaller than the House of Representatives
separation of powers	(noun) When the actions government can take to govern are divided among parts of the government in order to limit government's power
society	(noun) What comes when people live together in a community
tax	(noun) An amount of money, added to the regular cost of an item, that goes to the government
veto	(verb) To reject something; in government, to reject the final version of a bill passed by the legislature
voter turnout	(noun) The number of people who voted in an election divided by the number of people allowed to vote; shown as a percentage

