

# LESSON PLAN

## Executive Branch

**Level:** Literacy, Low Beginning

**Suggested Length:** 1 or 2 class periods, depending on class time and level

### Civics Test Questions

- #13—Name one branch or part of the government.
- #15—Who is in charge of the executive branch?
- #26—We elect a President for how many years?
- #27—In what month do we vote for President?
- #28—What is the name of the President of the United States now?
- #29—What is the name of the Vice President of the United States now?
- #30—If the President can no longer serve, who becomes President?
- #31—If both the President and the Vice President can no longer serve, who becomes President?
- #32—Who is the Commander in Chief of the military?
- #33—Who signs bills to become laws?
- #34—Who vetoes bills?
- #35—What does the President’s Cabinet do?
- #36—What are two Cabinet-level positions?
- #45—What are the two major political parties in the United States?
- #46—What is the political party of the President now?

### Reading Test Vocabulary

President, White House  
United States, U.S.  
What, Who  
can, do/does, has, is/was, name  
for, in, of, on, the, to, we

### Writing Test Vocabulary

President, White House  
United States  
November  
can, has, is/was, vote  
and, for, in, of, on, the, to, we

## Objectives:

Students will:

- identify the executive branch as one branch of the government
- learn about the president’s role in the government
- identify the current president and vice president and their party affiliation
- understand the function of the president’s cabinet
- identify several members of the cabinet and their respective departments
- explain presidential terms, election years/month
- explain the presidential order of succession

## Materials:

Civics Flash Cards or prepared sets of Civics Test items on the executive branch (see instructions under Evaluation Section)

Handouts: **The Executive Branch**, **The President’s Job**, **The President’s Cabinet**, **Voting for Presidents**, and **What Happens Next?**

Optional handout (Literacy Level Writing Practice): **The White House**

**The Executive Branch Lesson Answer Key**



## Lesson Overview and Notes to Teacher:

There are three separate lessons on the three branches of government. We recommend starting with the Executive Branch, followed by the Legislative Branch and then the Judicial Branch, as some of the information builds on a previous lesson. Also, students are probably most familiar with the executive branch and they may already know the answers to many of the questions covered in this lesson.

In planning this first government lesson, decide if you want to cover the material in one or two class sessions. The reading paragraphs cover 15 Civics Test items from System of Government, including the exact wording of various questions. In some cases, the students read the item and supply the answer. For example, the students fill in blanks about the sitting president and

vice president and their party affiliation. There is also a word scramble to reinforce the key vocabulary on the president's duties and a matching activity to review the departments of several cabinet members. Note that, in addition to the vice president, there are 15 cabinet members. The students need to name **two** cabinet-level positions for the test. In the handout, we include only a few departments that are easily illustrated with photos. Feel free to add other cabinet-level members to the lesson, if your students are interested and ready. Regarding the election process, the students fill in information about the month of presidential elections and the years. They also examine pictures that help reinforce the order of presidential succession. The Literacy Level Writing Practice handout **The White House** highlights vocabulary from the Reading and Writing Test.

**Introduction:** Tell the class you will talk about the U.S. government. Write **U.S. Government** on the board. Ask **How many parts (or branches) are in the U.S. government? (three)** Ask the class to name the branches. (You can draw a diagram similar to the one in the first handout.) Explain that there are different words for these branches that mean the same thing (**executive=president, legislative=Congress, judicial=courts**). Help the students with the

pronunciation of these words. Point out that **Name one branch or part of the government** is an item on the Civics Test. Note that any of these words (**executive, president, legislative, Congress, judicial, or courts**) are acceptable answers for this test item. Go around the classroom and ask the students to **Name one branch or part of the government**, and urge them to try different answers. They can also do this in paired practice or in small groups, taking turns asking and answering.

**Guided Practice:** Tell the students that you are going to study the executive branch today. Distribute the handout **The Executive Branch**. Review the three branches of government and ask the students about each picture (**the White House, the Capitol Building, the Supreme Court**). Note that the White House is highlighted to focus the students' attention on the executive branch. Ask **Who works/lives here?, What's the name of the building?, and Where is it?**, while you write the answers on the board. Then read each sentence 2-3 times out

loud for students to hear. Have the students repeat each line after you. For each question, elicit answers from the students and have them fill in the current information after each item. Point out that these questions are on the Civics Test: **Who is in charge of the executive branch?, What is the name of the President of the United States now?, What is the name of the Vice President of the United States now?, What are the two major political parties in the United States?, and What is the political party of the President now?**

**Practice:** Continue the same method reviewing the handout **The President's Job**. The pictures illustrate the presidential duties mentioned in the Civics Test items: **Who is the Commander in Chief of the military?, Who signs bills to become laws?, Who vetoes bills?, and Who is in charge of the executive branch?** Point out that the answer for each question is the **President**. Help the students with the pronunciation and usage of the word **who** as it is often confused with **how**. Since both words appear on the Reading Vocabulary list, review both words using familiar questions like, **How are you?, How old are you?, Who is the teacher in this class?, etc.** When viewing the photos and captions, ask the students

to identify the president and describe his actions. At the bottom of the handout, there is a word scramble to review some of the key vocabulary found in this reading. (See the **Answer Key** for the correct answers.) You will need to explain the president's part in signing or vetoing a bill. Write the word **bill** on the board. Explain that a bill is an **idea for a law** that comes from Congress. If the president agrees with the bill, he/she **signs** it and it becomes a formal law. If he/she does not agree, he/she can **veto** it and it does not become law. If that happens, it can still become a law if two-thirds of the Senate and two-thirds of the House vote in favor of the bill. This is a good way to demonstrate the idea of "checks and

balances.” Note that the students do not need to know the veto-override process for the test, but they do need to understand that the president can sign or veto a bill. To reinforce the vocabulary, write **sign=yes, veto=no** on the board for the students to copy.

Distribute the handout **The President’s Cabinet**. Review the sentences with the students focusing on the words **advise** and **advisor** (**advise=give ideas, advisor=person who gives ideas**). Explain that the executive branch has departments with experts in many areas, such as education, military, etc. Tell the students that an **expert** in charge of the department is usually called a **Secretary**. At the bottom of the handout, the students can match a cabinet-level position with a picture. Assure the students that they need to name only **two** cabinet heads for the Civics Test. Point out that **What does the President’s Cabinet do?** and **What are two Cabinet-level positions?** are items on the Civics Test.

The handouts **Voting for Presidents** and **What Happens Next?** deal specifically with presidential elections,

**Evaluation:** There are many Civics Test items to practice in this lesson. Therefore, it would be beneficial to give the students time to practice the questions and answers in pairs or small groups. You could either use several sets of the Civics Flash Cards or download the Flash Cards from the Citizenship Resource Center website (visit [www.uscis.gov/citizenship](http://www.uscis.gov/citizenship) and search for “cutout reversed Civics Flash Cards” for a printer-friendly version). For this activity, separate out the specific questions listed at the beginning of the lesson plan. Give a set of those questions to each pair or small group of students. Have the students take turns, choosing a random card and reading the item aloud for the others to answer. As the students quiz each other, circulate and offer assistance, as necessary. If this lesson is taught

**Additional Writing Practice for Literacy/Low Beginning Students:** The handout **The White House** is included for optional copy work. Students can practice

re-election, and order of presidential succession. Review the sentences as previously described, after discussing each picture. In **Voting for Presidents**, the students fill in the election years. (Note that identifying the election years is not part of the test, but the fill-in helps to illustrate that the elections are held every four years.) See the **Answer Key** for the upcoming election years for the calendar pages, and have students fill in the other current information as appropriate. In the handout **What Happens Next?**, ask the students if they can name the presidents in the photos. Go over the sentences and explain about re-election and order of succession. Help the students fill in the correct answers for the Civics Test items **If the President can no longer serve, who becomes President?** and **If both the President and Vice President can no longer serve, who becomes President?** Explain that the **Speaker of the House** (leader of the U.S. House of Representatives) becomes president in that case.

close to a presidential election, you could also hold a mock election in your class or program. Prepare a simple voting ballot with the current candidates’ names and their political parties as well as a place for a “write-in” vote. Explain that while it is an important right and responsibility for eligible U.S. citizens to vote, they also have the right to not vote without a penalty—this is helpful to discuss since this is not the case in many countries. Have the students mark their ballots secretly and submit their ballot in a box. Then have several class members read aloud each ballot and tabulate the votes on the board to ensure accuracy. Discuss with the students if they think that their presidential choice will be the same as in the upcoming election.

writing words from the Reading and Writing Vocabulary lists.