



4. What Is the President's Job? | Lesson Plan

What are the powers and limitations of the President of the United States?

Students will discover why the Founders limited the President by examining how governments can break down when leaders have too much power, too little accountability, or when decisions are made too quickly without safeguards.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify what Article II of the Constitution explains by stating that it establishes the executive branch and outlines the President's role.
- Describe the job of the President by explaining that the President leads the executive branch and carries out/enforces federal laws.
- List key presidential powers and limitations by naming at least two powers and two checks on those powers.
- Explain how the President is elected by summarizing the Electoral College in simple terms.
- Apply the concept of limited government by analyzing a crisis scenario and proposing at least one limit that prevents abuse of power while still allowing leaders to act.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Article:** Sections of the Constitution that give details about what the government can and cannot do, organized by branch.
- **Executive Branch:** The branch of the U.S. government that includes the President, vice president, the President's cabinet, and several federal agencies, which carries out and enforces the laws passed by Congress.
- **President:** The leader of the executive branch who is responsible for enforcing laws and directing the day-to-day work of the federal government.
- **Commander in Chief:** The role of the President, in which he is the highest leader of the U.S. military and directs it during conflicts or war.
- **Foreign Policy:** A plan for dealing with other countries that guides how the United States interacts, cooperates, or defends its interests internationally.
- **Cabinet:** A group of top government advisors chosen by the President who lead major departments and help the President make and carry out decisions.
- **Impeach:** A formal process used by Congress to accuse and potentially remove a president from office for serious wrongdoing or illegal actions.
- **Electoral College:** A system for electing the President in which states cast electoral votes so both large and small states influence the election outcome.

Educational Standards: CCRA.R.7, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.W.9, CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2

Academic Subject Areas: U.S. Constitution, U.S. History

Scan to watch episode:



What You'll Need

- Video: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: What Is the President's Job?* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: What Is the President's Job?* (Click [Here](#))
- Supplies: Paper, pencil, timer

Lesson Plan (45-55 minutes)

Warm Up: (5 minutes)

1. Review with students:
 - Some governments fail because leaders are too weak to act (anarchy / Articles of Confederation idea).
 - Some fail because leaders get too powerful (tyranny).
 - The Founders sought to establish a government that could respond quickly without allowing one person to dominate.
2. Teacher Prompt (display on the board or read aloud): Imagine choosing the principal of your school and getting to decide how much power he should have. What kinds of powers would you give him/her? What kinds of limits?
3. Call on 2-3 students. Write short responses on the board. (Key idea to surface: with power comes great responsibility, but also great temptation.)
4. Discuss the necessity of limitations on power, as well as just enough to get the job done. The Founders knew that without a strong President, the government would be too weak to do its job, but too much power could result in having a tyrant.
5. Explain that today's lesson is testing the President's job in different kinds of governments to see why the Founders put limits on executive power.

Government Scenario: Crisis Activity (10-12 minutes)

1. Put students into their same "government system" groups from previous lessons (or mix students up for variety). Each group draws or is assigned one crisis from the **Government Crisis Scenarios** (last page of lesson plan).
2. After students read over their crisis, hand out worksheets (one per student) and ask them to complete the "**Crisis! Power Grab!**" section.
3. Teacher help section: If students get stuck on how to find a limit, help them with these prompts:
 - **Dictatorship**: Should a person control the news? Should emergency power end at some point? How might they end?
 - **Absolute Monarchy**: Is it fair to search a person's home based on the whim of the king/queen? Who should decide if a search is allowed?
 - **Oligarchy**: Should emotions or loyalty be the basis of giving aid? What should guide assistance for the needs of the people?
 - **Theocracy**: Should one person have the power to tell others what to believe?
 - **Communist Government**: Should police work for one person's goals? What should law enforcement do?

- **Direct Democracy:** What happens when people vote when they are angry?
4. Share Out and Class Comparison: Ask groups to present their scenarios briefly to the class. This provides students with an opportunity to learn about issues that different kinds of governments can have.
 5. Save the other elements of the worksheet until after students have watched the video and received direct instruction.

Founders Purpose: What Is the President's Job? (5-7 minutes)

1. Direct Instruction: Explain plainly what the executive branch of the government is, along with the role and responsibilities of the President.
 - Article II of the Constitution explains the executive branch by describing the President's job, powers, and limits, and it mentions the President's advisors who help him carry out the law. But it is intentionally broad so that the President has the flexibility to exercise authority in unexpected situations that may come up.
 - Sections 2 and 3 lay out the responsibilities of the President. the President is commonly described as having eight major jobs, some of which are described in the Constitution, and some are traditional/modern. They include titles such as Chief Executive, Commander in Chief, Head of State, Chief Diplomat, Chief Administrator, and more. These describe how the President has a leading role in many situations.
 - If there is a war, he calls the shots.
 - He determines how our country interacts with other countries.
 - He appoints his own Cabinet (but the Senate has to approve).
 - He appoints judges to federal courts.
 - Presidential power is balanced with checks from the other branches:
 - the President cannot spend government money without Congress approving it.
 - Only Congress can declare war.
 - the President can be impeached and removed for serious wrongdoing.
 - the President is elected through the Electoral College: citizens vote in their states, and the states' electors cast the official votes for president. In most states, the statewide winner gets all of the electoral votes, but Maine and Nebraska can split electoral votes by congressional district.
 - the President is elected for a four-year term.
 - the President can serve a total of two terms.
2. Next, introduce the video that students will watch, and have them listen for the key ideas from above.

Watch and Discuss: (10-15 minutes)

1. Watch *History in 5: Constitution Explained: What Is the President's Job?* uninterrupted.
2. After the video, discuss the following questions to check for understanding and prepare students to complete the worksheet:

- Why did the Founders want an executive branch? (*To enforce laws / to lead and act quickly when needed*)
 - What is the executive branch? Who is in it? (*President + Vice President + Cabinet + departments/agencies*)
 - Name two powers the President has. (*Commander in Chief, foreign policy leadership, appoints Cabinet, appoints judges*)
 - Name two limits on the President's power. (*Can't spend money without Congress, Congress declares war, can be impeached, elections*)
 - How is the President elected? (*Electoral College – people vote for electors in their state*)
3. Allow time for students to complete the rest of the worksheet. Scaffold and differentiate as warranted based on student needs.

Wrap Up: (5 minutes)

1. Have students complete an exit ticket or door check (spoken or written):
 - Name one power of the President along with one limit.
 - How long is the President's term?
2. Let students know that they'll continue their civilization activity with the next lesson
(Lesson 5): *Constitution Explained: Is the Supreme Court Supreme?*

Don't have time for a full lesson? Quick Activity (30 minutes)

Distribute one Government Crisis Scenario slip to each group of students and invite them to complete the "**Crisis! Power Grab!**" section of the "**What Is the President's Job?**" Worksheet. Then watch the video, and work through the suggested discussion questions.

Government Crises Scenarios

Note: Government systems were assigned in Lesson 1. Students should use their assigned government system for this lesson as well. Scenarios are broad and meant for analysis and discussion.

Dictatorship – A deadly illness breaks out and spreads fast. The dictator reacts immediately and announces that he is taking full control of all news, medicine, and travel until he feels the emergency is over. Anyone who questions him will be jailed for spreading panic and disorder.

Question: What could go wrong with this kind of order? What limit would protect the people while still letting the leader act?

Absolute Monarchy – A rumor spreads that enemy spies are hiding in the kingdom. The king declares that no one may leave their home after sunset to protect their safety and that guards can search any home at any time. Anyone who complains will be arrested for helping the enemy.

Question: What could go wrong with this kind of order? What limit would protect the people while still letting the leader act?

Oligarchy – A particularly rainy season results in flooding across the land. The oligarch leaders decide to help the towns that support their rule. If there is any aid left over, they might be willing to help other towns, or not, depending on how they feel about the town.

Question: What could go wrong with this kind of order? What limit would protect the people while still letting the leader act?

Theocracy – The religious leader of the land declares that all religions except the one that he endorses are illegal to practice. Anyone who believes differently, speaks differently, or prays differently will be sent to jail.

Question: What could go wrong with this kind of order? What limit would protect the people while still letting the leader act?

Communist Government – The communist leader begins to suspect that people are plotting against him. In his paranoia, he creates a secret police force that will work solely for him and carry out all his orders. They are allowed to listen to phone conversations, search homes, arrest people, and punish anyone the leader calls a threat.

Question: What could go wrong with this kind of order? What limit would protect the people while still letting the leader act?

Direct Democracy – A small island off the coast of your nation refuses to form an alliance with your land. Some people worry that other islands will also refuse, and many in your land feel angry and insulted by this island's refusal. The citizens meet to vote, and a few loud people say that the island must be punished and made an example so no one else dares to say no.

Question: What could go wrong when big decisions are made by a huge crowd in the moment? What limits would prevent the mob from making emotional decisions?