Teacher’s Guide

A Very Big Branch

Time Needed: One class period

Materials Needed:
Student worksheets
Projector / Transparencies

Copy Instructions:
Reading (2 pages; class set)
Worksheet (2 pages; class set)

Learning Objectives. Students will be able to:
- Explain the roles and responsibilities of executive departments and the president’s cabinet.
- Describe how executive departments and agencies enforce governmental policies.
- Examine regulatory agencies and their social, economic, and political impact on the country.

Step by Step

☐ Anticipate
by asking students if they know the different ways the government is involved in their day-to-day lives.

☐ Distribute
the reading pages to the class.

☐ Read
together with the class, pausing to discuss and explain as appropriate.

☐ Check
for understanding by doing the true/false active participation activity with the class.

☐ Project
the alphabet soup activity. Use pieces of paper to cover up the acronyms.

☐ Reveal
each acronym on it’s own. Call on the entire class to guess the acronym. Give clues to the students if they get stuck (e.g. Do you see any patterns? What word does the “D” usually stand for? Is the “D” word always included in the acronym?) Use each question as an opportunity for discussion and review.

☐ Distribute
the worksheets to the class. Review the instructions with students.

☐ Assign
students to complete the activities.

☐ Review
the answers to the worksheet if you wish.

☐ Close
by writing these four words on the board: President, executive, cabinet, departments. Ask students to construct a sentence that uses all four words (in any order). Have students share their sentences with a partner, and then randomly call on students to share their partner’s sentence with the class.
We’ve Got a Job to Do

The job of the executive branch is to carry out the laws that the legislative branch passes. When you think of the executive branch, you probably think of the president. But the president is only the head of the executive branch. He is like the tip of the iceberg: underneath, there is a giant organization with lots of people doing many different jobs. In fact, the executive branch is the largest branch of our government!

Help From Many

Most of the executive branch is made up of departments and independent agencies. **Departments** are the main organizations in the executive branch. There are 15 departments. Each one focuses on a specific type of activity such as education, transportation, defense, or energy. Each department has smaller agencies that do specific jobs. For example, the Department of Justice (DOJ) operates our justice system and works to prevent crime. Two agencies inside the DOJ are the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The FBI investigates certain kinds of crimes, while the DEA deals with crime related to drugs and controlled substances.

The president appoints a **secretary** to lead each department. (But the head of the Department of Justice is called the Attorney General). These secretaries do more than just lead a department. They are the president’s **cabinet**—a group of people that give advice to help the president make important decisions. Officials who hold these **cabinet-level positions** such as the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Education, or the Secretary of Homeland Security, are very important players in the executive branch.

**Independent agencies** are government organizations that also focus on specific issues, but they are different from departments because they are independent of the president’s control. Instead, these agencies are controlled by a board or commission. The president can appoint someone to the board or commission but cannot remove them.

Carrying Out Laws: Enforcement

What does it mean to “carry out” a law? That depends on the kind of law that needs to be carried out. Some laws make things illegal and describe consequences for those who do those things. Executive agencies **enforce** the law when someone isn’t following it. There are several things an agency can do to enforce a law:

- Educate the public about new laws
- Monitor the public to make sure laws are being followed
- Catch individuals or organizations not following the law
- Take the offenders to court
- Follow any other enforcement procedures the agency may have
A Very Big Branch

Carrying Out Laws: Regulations

Other laws are just instructions about something that must be done, such as installing new security procedures at the nation’s airports. A law like this will not include every last detail about how it should be carried out. Instead, the law will authorize the executive branch to decide these details. The rules the executive branch makes about how the law will be carried out are called regulations. Regulations have power similar to laws. Some regulations make activity illegal, and others give instructions for how something must be done.

Agencies Enforce and Regulate

Most departments and agencies both enforce laws and make regulations. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is an independent agency whose goal is to protect the environment and human health. It carries out laws passed by Congress, such as the Clean Air Act that is designed to limit air pollution. The Clean Air Act authorizes the EPA to set limits on how much pollution can be put into the air. To do this, the EPA issues regulations that say exactly how much pollution vehicles, factories, and other sources can put into the air. The EPA then works to enforce these regulations. Violating them can result in penalties.

Maintaining Order and Safety

We depend on many parts of the executive branch to keep us safe and to keep order. For example, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is responsible for protecting the United States against all kinds of threats. It includes agencies that deal with terrorism, natural disasters, and border protection. It even includes the Secret Service, whose agents protect the president! Inside the DHS, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) responds to natural disasters to help people get the help they need in an orderly way. The Coast Guard, also part of DHS, patrols our nation’s coastlines to watch for threats and help boats in distress.

The Department of Defense (DoD) is the biggest department. It includes all the military departments such as the Army, Navy, and Air Force, as well as many other agencies. Together, all the parts of the Department of Defense work together to make sure our armed forces are prepared to protect our nation’s security.

Busy, Busy

Remember that most of the day-to-day activity in the executive branch involves ordinary people doing the work that needs to be done: an FBI agent conducts an investigation, a soldier participates in training exercises, or a worker monitors a nuclear reactor at an energy plant. The executive branch needs people to answer phones, program computers, file papers, do scientific research, process mail, fly airplanes, and clean bathrooms. In fact, the federal government is the nation’s largest employer, and most of those jobs are in the executive branch.
True/False Active Participation Review

Directions: Read each statement aloud to the class. Have the class respond in unison either by answering “true” or “false” as a chorus or by showing you “thumbs up” for true and “thumbs down” for false. Watch or listen for wrong or mixed answers, indicating confusion. Use each statement as an opportunity to quickly reinforce and discuss the concept before moving on.

1. The executive branch is only the president. (F — The branch also includes many departments and agencies.)

2. Each government department has a leader called a secretary. (T)

3. The 15 department heads are all part of the president’s cabinet. (T)

4. The president’s cabinet is a group of people who guard the president. (F — The cabinet members advise the president.)

5. Government agencies only make rules; they can’t enforce rules. (F — Agencies make rules, or regulations, and they have the power to enforce them.)

6. Some parts of the executive branch are businesses the government owns. (T — These are called government corporations.)

7. The president has total control over independent agencies. (F — Independent agencies are controlled by boards; the president can’t remove board members after they are appointed.)

8. Enforcing laws can include educating the public, catching lawbreakers, and taking people to court. (T)

9. When Congress passes a law, the law includes every detail about how it must be carried out. (F — Laws usually do not include all the details. The executive branch decides those.)

10. Most of the work done in the executive branch is done by the president. (F — Most of the work is done by ordinary people employed by executive departments.)

11. Regulations are executive branch rules that have the power of laws. (T — Congress authorizes the executive branch to make regulations, usually to decide the details of how a law will be carried out.)

12. A big role of the executive branch is to keep the nation safe. (T — Departments involved include the Department of Defense and the Dep’t of Homeland Security.)
A Very Big Branch

Alphabet Soup
You saw some acronyms in the reading. Can you remember what these stand for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOJ</th>
<th>FBI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEA</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPA</td>
<td>DHS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMA</td>
<td>DoD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did you notice any patterns? See if you can figure out which agencies these are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DoE</th>
<th>DoEd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HHS</td>
<td>HUD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA</td>
<td>CIA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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A. Cabinet Departments. Use the word bank to fill in the missing words from the graphic organizer:

**The President’s Cabinet**

Executive Branch Departments

**SECRETARY OF STATE**
Department of State
Manages our relationships with foreign ____________

**SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY**
Department of the Treasury
Collects taxes, prints ____________
deals with the nation’s finances ____________

**SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**
Department of Defense
Manages the ____________ forces
and conducts wars overseas ____________

**SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR**
Department of the Interior
Manages and protects the nation’s ____________

**SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE**
Department of Agriculture
Works with ____________
and regulates farm products ____________

**SECRETARY OF COMMERCE**
Department of Commerce
Supervises ____________
and promotes U.S. businesses ____________

**SECRETARY OF LABOR**
Department of Labor
Helps workers get fair ____________
and working conditions ____________

**SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**
Department of Transportation
Oversees ____________
safety and air, rail, and sea travel ____________

**SECRETARY OF ENERGY**
Department of Energy
Researches sources of ____________
and electricity for the nation ____________

**SECRETARY OF EDUCATION**
Department of Education
Gives money for K-12 schools and student ____________ loans

**SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**
Department of Veterans Affairs
Provides services for people who served in the ____________

**SECRETARY OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**
Dep’t of Health & Human Services
Gives services for Americans’ health and ____________

**SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY**
Department of Homeland Security
Protects against ____________
and other threats ____________

**SEC. OF HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT**
Dep’t of Housing & Urban Development
Creates strong communities and
affordable ____________

Worksheet p. 1
C. Whose Job Is It, Anyway? Identify the executive agency that would most likely execute each act:

- Increases educational benefits for military veterans who have served since September 11, 2001.
  
  Agency: 

- Ensures that students in every public school achieve important learning goals by well-prepared teachers.
  
  Agency: 

D. Enforce and Regulate. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) works to protect public health and safety. Decide if each item on the list is a CDC regulation or enforcement activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enforcement Activity</th>
<th>Regulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>□ Educate people and organizations about health regulations.</td>
</tr>
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<td>□</td>
<td>□ Entities cannot dispose of waste within five miles of water systems.</td>
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<td>□ Monitor workplaces to see if they are following safety procedures.</td>
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<td>□</td>
<td>□ Factories cannot dispose of anything containing mercury near a water system.</td>
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<td>□</td>
<td>□ Make sure food producers and suppliers are following food safety regulations.</td>
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** Alphabet Soup **

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<td>Attorney General</td>
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<td>Environmental Protection Agency</td>
<td>Department of Homeland Security</td>
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<td>Federal Emergency Management Agency</td>
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<td>Department of Housing and Urban Development</td>
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<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY
Department of the Treasury
Collects taxes, prints money
deals with the nation’s finances

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
Department of Defense
Manages the armed forces
and conducts wars overseas

ATTORNEY GENERAL
Department of Justice
Fights crime and runs the federal court system

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
Department of the Interior
Manages and protects the nation’s public lands

SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE
Department of Agriculture
Works with farmers
and regulates farm products

SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
Department of Commerce
Supervises trade and promotes U.S. businesses

SECRETARY OF LABOR
Department of Labor
Helps workers get fair wages
and working conditions

SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
Department of Transportation
Oversees highway safety and air, rail, and sea travel

SECRETARY OF ENERGY
Department of Energy
Researches sources of fuel
and electricity for the nation

SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
Department of Education
Gives money for K-12 schools and student college loans

SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Department of Veterans Affairs
Provides services for people who served in the military

SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY
Department of Homeland Security
Protects against terrorists
and other threats

SEC. OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
Dep’t of Health & Human Services
Gives services for Americans’ health
and basic needs

SEC. OF HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT
Dep’t of Housing & Urban Development
Creates strong communities and affordable homes

Worksheet p. 1
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  - Agency: Department of Veterans Affairs

- Ensures that students in every public school achieve important learning goals by well-prepared teachers.
  - Agency: Department of Education

- Monitor workplaces to see if they are following safety procedures.
  - Agency: Environmental Protection Agency

- Factory cannot dispose of anything containing mercury near a water system.
  - Agency: Department of Agriculture

- Make sure food producers and suppliers are following food safety regulations.
  - Agency: Department of Agriculture

- Children must be vaccinated before entering school.
  - Agency: Department of Transportation

- Evaluate effectiveness of health care services.
  - Agency: Department of Health and Human Services

- Educate people and organizations about health regulations.
  - Agency: Department of Health and Human Services

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