

## ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL LOCAL GOVERNMENT CURRICULA

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### **Title: Local Government's "Piece of the Pie"**

**Theme:** Applying the universal purposes of government to all levels (local, state, national) to illustrate that the local level of government can be the most effective because it is the most personal and clearly tied to the people for which it serves.

#### **GLCE:**

**C1.1** Nature of Civic Life, Politics, and Government

*Describe Civic Life, Politics, and Government and explain their relationships*

**Materials:** Handouts A & B  
Newspaper articles on national, state, and local policy issues

*Advanced preparation by the teacher: Contact your local township office to gather information regarding local government structure pertinent to where you live. (A few helpful websites are: <http://www.michigantownships.org/>, [www.mml.org](http://www.mml.org) and [www.mta-townships.org](http://www.mta-townships.org) ) This preparation will allow you to illustrate for students how their local community is structured to serve ideas about government in a democracy. This becomes critical when students have to analyze how local government might have a different structure but still serves the basic purposes as government at any other level.*

*Additionally, prepare ahead of time, a few examples of current, local public policy issues by collecting newspaper articles and other sources of information that you may have on the current "hot" topics.*

#### **Methodological procedures:**

This unit will take approximately 4 class periods.

#### **Day #1 (Approx. lesson time: 30 minutes.)**

Write the following quote on the board for students to ponder:

"The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government." --Thomas Jefferson

Ask students to spend a minute or two writing on a piece of paper what Jefferson's quote means to them as far as what they believe to be is the **purpose** of a democratic government.

Place students in small groups to have them share their written responses. In addition, place the task before them that they are to brainstorm a list of what they believe should be goals or purposes of any effective government. After approximately 10 minutes, have groups share their answers through a class discussion paying particular attention to, and noting on the board, common goals or purposes shared by a majority of groups.

Share with students the list of seven purposes/goals of government in a representative democracy: **(a) Individual Rights, (b) Life, (c) Liberty, (d) Property, (e) The Common Good as well as limiting the power of government through the constitutional principles of (f) The**

**Separation of Powers and (g) Checks and Balances.** While explaining each of the purposes, refer to the “common list” that the class had collaboratively comprised to see if the class had omitted any of the purposes. If there were any purposes left off of the class-generated list, ask if students believe if they should be added. Ask for explanations to justify responses.

Assessment: Students are to write a brief response to the following prompt: *Explain why all seven purposes of government are explicitly stated in the Constitution. Use examples to support your rationale.* (For the student who might need an additional challenge, the prompt could be changed: Argue against one of the purposes of government and why it wouldn’t be necessary in our democratic form of government.)

**Day #2: Research day. (Approximate lesson time: one hour if using computer lab with students; shorter if teacher pulls newspaper articles ahead of time.)**

This activity is centered on the use of newspaper articles to illustrate a contemporary example of each of the purposes of government. Therefore, if students need practice with technological research skills, a computer lab situation would be beneficial but is not required since many newspapers could be compiled and used just as effectively.

Students should be grouped for this task. (Small groups of 3-4 students works best.)

**Option A: have each group focus on one or two purposes of government and select multiple newspaper articles to illustrate the examples. Option B: have each group find one example for each of the purposes of government.**

Students will then present their findings to the class.

Instruction Note: During this activity examples of the purposes of government that are found by students can be illustrative at the local, state, or national level. It is during the following lesson where the analysis as to how the purposes actually “play out” differently at the various levels of government will be emphasized.

**Day #3: (Approx. lesson time: 45 minutes)**

This lesson is divided into 2 parts:

- 1) Student work groups from Day #2, will present some of the newspaper articles that are their best illustrations of the purposes of government.

After presentations have been concluded the following questions can lead class discussion and help students make the connection that the purposes of government are the same at the local, state, and national levels of government. The scenario in which the purposes are played out may look a little different, but the purposes are still the same. Some questions to ask students to help clarify the difference between the situation and the purpose of government to which the situation is related are:

- Are there some examples/situations that you found that might only occur at the national level of government? (i.e., a military conflict with another country)
- Are there some examples/situations that you found that could occur at another level of government? (i.e., an individual rights issue or a safety issue)
- Are there some examples/situations that you found that would only occur at the local level because of the nature of the situation? (i.e., trash service, imposing of a curfew, expanding a city’s boundary, etc.)

Most importantly, it is important that students understand that there are benefits to an issue that gets resolved at the local level. Some of those reasons are as follows:

- it usually gets resolved faster because there aren't nearly as many people involved as there would be at the state and national levels,
- there are fewer steps that have to be followed in the process of resolution,
- there are fewer key players,
- because it is a local issue the key players who are involved have a very personal stake in what is happening

(It is important to note that at this point students should also understand that there is a difference between purposes of government and activities of government like generating revenue, for example, and that the types of governmental services provided are not required by the constitution, and that the power of local governments to provide such services may be provided and therefore services are at the will of the people.)

- 2) Now that students have a clear picture of the purposes of government in a democracy, have them compare the purposes of government in a democracy to a dictatorship. Provide students with information on a dictatorship so that students understand what a dictatorship is through specific examples of nations that utilize dictatorship as the form of government. (i.e., Cuba, North Korea, etc.) Engage students in a class discussion using a Venn Diagram to compare the purposes of government in both a democracy and a dictatorship. (If time is an issue, the class discussion could be started with one comparison between one of the purposes of government and students could be assigned one of the other purposes to compare in a written piece.)

#### **Day #4: (Approx. lesson time: 30 minutes)**

As students now have an understanding of the purposes of government and how those purposes are played out at all levels, this day's focus will be on the application at the local level. Select an issue that has been prevalent in your local community using your knowledge of an issue as well as information gathered through state and local newspapers. Once you have shared the issue with students through the reading of newspaper articles and other forms of written information on the issue, review students' knowledge of the purposes of government and ask students which of the purposes of government they believe applies to the particular issue.

After students have clear knowledge about the issue, distribute the diagram of "The Types of Local Government in Michigan." (Handout B) This one-page diagram will assist with an explanation of how local governments in Michigan are organized. Depending on location, place particular emphasis on the type of local government where students reside. (For example, if most students live in a city, make sure that students understand that a city form of government typically has a mayor, manager, or commission at its helm. Townships on the other hand, are run through a general law or charter format.) Be sure to explain what that looks like with students. (Handout A provides written explanation to all of the visuals included in Handout B for clarification with students.)

Trace the issue with the students (to the point where the issue currently lies) with students using the appropriate local government structure. (For example, if following a current issue in a city where a mayor-council form is in place, students will need to know that the key players are a

mayor and a city council and that the city council is the legislative branch of city government and its approval would be required before any ordinances could go into effect.) (Refer to Handout A pp. 7-14)

Additional supplement to this lesson: Have students simulate a public meeting on the current issue that has been discussed.

Assessment: Provide students with a second current local policy issue and after assigning each student a particular form of local government have each student complete the following tasks:

- 1) A clarification as to which of the purposes of government the current issue applies.
- 2) A brief account as to where the issue currently lies. (For example, have there been public meetings held on this issue? What other actions have been taken with regard to this issue? Has an ordinance been passed?)
- 3) Using the structure of the type of local form of government assigned, explain who the key players are with regard to resolution of this current policy issue.
- 4) Explain how a local current policy issue is different from a state or national level issue in how it gets resolved. Think about: the number of people affected, the size of the legislative “key players” involved, and the quickness in which an issue can be resolved.

**Available downloads:**

**Handout A—Michigan Local Government Structure, Services and Practices  
(resource guide)**

**Handout B—Types of Local Government in Michigan**