

LESSON 1

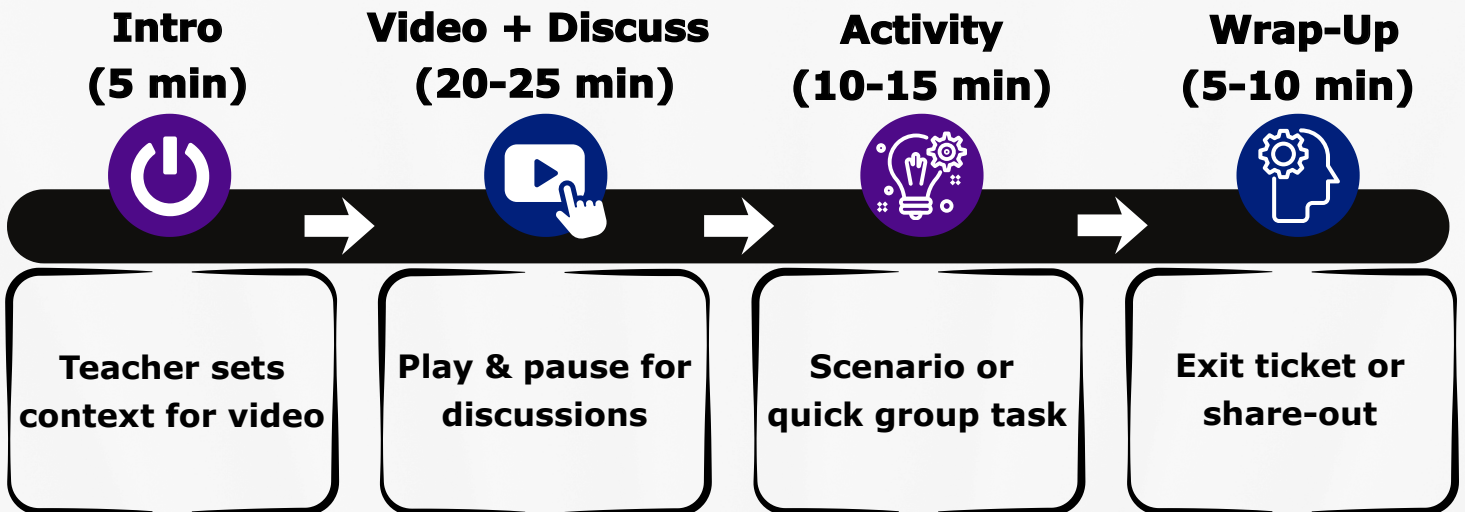
WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT?

USE WITH VIDEO: "WHAT EVEN IS THE U.S. GOVERNMENT?" [@Link](#)

LESSON GOAL

Students will understand the basic definition of the U.S. government, core democratic principles, and their role in a democracy.

LESSON FLOW (40–50 MIN)



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Explain** the U.S. government as a democratic republic where power is held by the people.
- **Analyze** the four principles of democracy—popular sovereignty, rights and liberties, rule of law, and participation—and evaluate their importance today.
- **Discuss** how systems balance majority rule with protection of minority rights, using current examples.

NM STANDARDS [@Link](#)

- 9-12.Civ.33 → civic virtues, role of people in government
- 9-12.Civ.36 → tensions between groups & common good
- 9-12.Civ.27 → change in societies, protecting rights
- 9-12.Civ.28 → justice system's impact
- 9-12.Civ.49 → informed action in community



Detailed Lesson Flow

INTRO (2-3 MIN)



Teacher Cue: “Today we’re going to watch a short civics video from the NM Courts. It will introduce what government is, the principles of democracy, and the founding documents. I’ll pause a few times so we can talk about what we see and connect it to our lives.”

Optional Hook Question: Who do you think has more power in our government — the people or the leaders? Have students justify their answers

VIDEO + PAUSE & DISCUSS (20-25 MIN)



0:13 – What is Government?

- **Q: “How would you describe the U.S. government?”**

A: rules, laws, elected reps.

2:25 – Participation

- **Q: “How can people participate?”**

A: voting, petitions, protests, jury duty, seek elective or appointive office

4:32 – Majority vs. Minority

- **Q: “What protects minority rights?”**

A: courts, Constitution, checks & balances.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY (10-15 MIN)



Teacher says: “Let’s apply the principles of democracy to real-life school scenarios. You’ll act as judges and decide which principle is at stake and how it should be resolved.”

Scenarios (choose or assign):

1. **Protest Armbands** – Students wear armbands to protest; school bans them.
 - **Principles:** Rights & Liberties, Participation
 - **Guidance:** Free expression is protected unless it disrupts learning (Tinker v. Des Moines).
2. **Backpack Search** – Principal searches a backpack without cause.
 - **Principles:** Rule of Law, Rights & Liberties
 - **Guidance:** Searches must be reasonable (NJ v. TLO).
3. **Student Petition** – Students petition to change a school rule.
 - **Principles:** Participation, Popular Sovereignty
 - **Guidance:** Petitions are a valid form of civic voice.

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Detailed Lesson Flow

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY CONTINUED



Instructions:

- Groups of 2–3 discuss:
 - **Which principle applies?**
 - **How would you rule if you were the judge?**
- Groups **share a short summary** and **ruling** back to the class.

Debrief (Teacher):

Reinforce: “Democracy protects rights, applies laws fairly, and depends on participation — even in schools.”

WRAP-UP (5-10 MIN)



Exit Ticket Options: Write: “Democracy matters because...” OR Share: “One way I can participate in democracy is...”

Teacher Cue: Call on 2–3 students to share their answers. Connect back to the Lesson Goal: Democracy depends on people — all of us — participating and protecting rights.

OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (20–40 MIN EACH)



Historical Character Portrait

- Create a character from the founding era (any race, class, gender, or social background).
- Present who they were, what they were doing, and their perspective as the U.S. became a nation.

(Standards: [Civ.16], [Civ.32], [Civ.36])

Modern Declaration Rewrite

- Translate the Declaration of Independence into modern English.
- Discuss how the meaning compares to the founders’ intent.

(Standards: [Civ.23], [Civ.27], [Civ.14])

Knowledge Check & Feedback

STUDENT QUIZ & FEEDBACK

<https://tinyurl.com/lesson1student>



TEACHER FEEDBACK

<https://tinyurl.com/lesson1teacher>

