

# Journalist: What is a Government?

## Adventure Description:

In this adventure, students will think like journalists and write a newspaper article on their experience building a railroad track in a city with and without a government.

## Activity

Teacher Note:

- You will need to cut out the the cards on Handout: City With No Government Cards for this step.

### Step One: Background Information on Governments (5-10 minutes)

- Show Video: [Understanding Our Government](#).
- Explain to students that a government is made up of leaders who make rules and enforce them. Show [Handout: Government Responsibilities](#). Discuss how the government has a lot of different responsibilities!
- Discuss what could happen if our country didn't have a government. Examples include:
  - There wouldn't be laws to make sure our society is safe. For example, there wouldn't be laws about how fast you can drive on the road. As a result, people might drive too fast, which is dangerous. There also wouldn't be laws that say you can't steal from others. As a result, people could steal things from other people without getting in trouble.
  - There also might not be public schools, hospitals, police departments, or fire departments. This is because the government helps pays for those.

### Step Two: Activity Set Up (5 minutes)

- Explain to students that the class will play a game. During the game, students will work in groups to build a railroad track that will go through a city. The goal of the game is to build the longest track. Each group will get supplies, like tape and popsicle sticks, to build their railroad track.
- Explain to students that the game will be played in two phases. During the first phase, groups will build their railroad tracks, but there will be no government to create or enforce rules. During the second phase, there will be a government in place.
- After the game is over, students will be journalists and will write about how the game they played was different when there was and was not a government. Journalists write stories so they can teach others about what they have learned!
- Divide students into five groups. Provide each group with the following materials:
  - Roll of tape
  - 1 pair of scissors
  - 15 popsicle sticks
  - 5 pieces of tinfoil (or tissue paper)

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## Step Three: Phase One of Game (15 minutes)

- Explain to students that they will begin by playing the first phase of the game. In this phase, there is no government in the city they are building a track in.
- Discuss how there won't be a leader or any rules or punishments. Ask students what could happen in a city with no government. Examples include: stealing, speeding, destroying property.
- Have students begin building their tracks.
- After three minutes has passed:
  - Tell the class you have an announcement. Have students stop building.
  - Tell the class that you will be coming around and giving each group a card. Explain that the card will show a way that their group can slow down another group so that they cannot build as long of a track. Examples include: stealing their tape, breaking a part of their railroad, etc.
  - Each group will decide if they want to follow the directions on the card or not. Remind students that since there is no government in place this round, they can slow a group down without getting in trouble!
- Give each group a card from [Handout: City With No Government Cards](#).
- Have each group spend 30 seconds deciding if they want to follow the directions listed on the card.
- Move around the room asking each group whether or not they would like to carry out the action on their cards.
  - If groups don't want to follow the directions, have them return the card to you (the teacher).
  - If groups want to follow the directions, have them carefully follow the directions listed.
- Have students build for another three minutes.
- After another three minutes has passed, explain to students that the phase of the game without a government is now over.
- Have a short discussion about what it was like to build a track without a government in place. Ask students:
  - Did you choose to slow down another group? Why or why not?
  - Did not having rules make it easier or harder to build your track?
  - How would this part of the game been different if there were punishments in place if someone tried to slow down another group?

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## Step Four: Phase Two of Game (10 minutes)

- Teacher Note: You will need to cut out the the cards on [Handout: City With A Government- Cards](#) for this step.
- Announce to the class that they will now play the second phase of the game. In this phase, there is a government in the city they are building a track in.
- Discuss how the city now has leaders, rules, and punishments when people break the laws.
- Have students continue building their tracks.
- After three minutes has passed:
  - Tell the class you have an announcement. Have students stop building.
  - Tell the class that you (the teacher) will be coming around and giving each group another card. The card will show a way that their group can slow down another group down. However, this time, there is a government in place! This means that there could be a punishment for groups' actions. For example, if they steal tape from another group, the punishment will be that their own tape and popsicle sticks get taken away.
- Give each group a card from [Handout: City With A Government- Cards](#).
- Have each group spend 30 seconds deciding if they want to follow the directions listed on the card.
- Move around the room asking each group whether or not they would like to carry out the action on their cards.
  - If groups don't want to follow the directions, have them return the card to you (the teacher).
  - If groups want to follow the directions, have them carefully follow the directions listed.
- Have students build for another three minutes.
- After the three minutes has passed:
  - Explain to the class that the game is over!
  - Measure each group's railroad track to see who built the longest track.
- Have a short discussion about what it was like to build a track with a government in place. Ask students:
  - Did the punishments stop you from slowing down another group? Why or why not?
  - Did you enjoy building the track in the city with the government or without the government? Why?

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## Step Five: Writing a Newspaper Article (10 minutes)

- Have a short class discussion about what it was like to build a railroad tracks in a place with and without a government. Ask students:
  - What was different about building your track with and without a government?
  - Did you enjoy building your train track without the government in place or with it in place? Why?
  - How did the government help you in the second phase of the game?
  - What would it be like if the government didn't exist in real life?
- Explain to students that they will now write a newspaper article on their experience building railroad tracks in a place with and without a government.
- Show [Handout: How to Write a Newspaper Article](#). Discuss the handout as a class.
- Then, provide each student with [Handout: Writing a Newspaper Article](#). Have students work individually or in their groups to write their article.
- As students are working, discuss the following:
  - What do you want to tell others about the government?
  - How can you use words and pictures to show others how the government helps?

## Materials List

### Provided online:

- Video: Understanding Our Government
- Handout: Government Responsibilities
- Handout: City With No Government Cards
- Handout: City With A Government Cards.
- Handout: How to Write a Newspaper Article
- Handout: Writing a Newspaper Article

### Not provided: Per Group

- Roll of tape
- 1 pair of scissors
- 15 popsicle sticks
- 5 pieces of tinfoil (or tissue paper)

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