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## CHAPTER 5

# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GOVERNMENT

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The theme of this chapter, governmental responsibilities, has the potential of being examined from numerous perspectives. In this chapter, students will consider what life would be like without government and then will focus on select governmental services that citizens around the world often take for granted. While exploring these perspectives on governmental responsibility, students will learn vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme. As students improve their language skills, they will develop an understanding of some of the challenges that governments face while serving the citizenry of their countries. The 50-minute lesson which follows can be used in a variety of ways: teachers can use it as a single, stand-alone lesson; they can design a series of connected lessons that explore the topic in more detail; or they can develop a thematic unit that examines the topic from a variety of perspectives over a longer period of time. The lesson-plan ideas presented here are meant to serve as a starting point for teachers interested in introducing this topic to their students.

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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A civil society depends on the active and ethical participation of both its citizenry and government--at local, regional, and national levels. Governments that provide for the safety, security, health, and basic necessities of all citizens, rather than particular groups or individuals, help nurture civil societies. Ideally, all citizens in civil societies share in the benefits of economic growth. When governments work for the benefit of society as a whole, instead of catering to private, self-seeking interests of class, dynasty, race, religion, or ethnicity, it is said that they are working toward the "common good." Basically, attending to all citizens, rather than a select few, is the hallmark of governments attempting to work toward the common good. (See Quigley & Bahmueller, 1991, for a more detailed discussion of the common good.)

How can a government cater to the common good? What responsibilities does a government have toward its citizenry? The answers to these questions are largely dependent on how one defines government. Consider the following definitions:

- Government can be described as the people and groups within a society with the authority to make, carry out, and enforce laws; to manage disputes about laws; and to provide for the defense of the nation (National Standards for Civics and Government, 1994).
- Government, when directed toward worthy purposes and conducted effectively in accord with basic principles of justice, can be a powerful force for the protection of personal, political, and economic rights of individuals and the promotion of the common good (National Standards for Civics and Government, 1994).
- Government is the formal institution of a society with the authority to make and implement binding decisions about such matters as the distribution of resources, allocation of benefits and burdens, and the management of conflicts (National Standards for Civics and Government, 1994).

Based on these definitions alone, one can see that governmental responsibilities are monumental. A few moments of contemplation lead to the realization that differing ideas about the purposes of government can have profound consequences for the well-being of individuals and the society. In this chapter, the focus is on select governmental responsibilities and corresponding services, including public health, safety, transportation, education, and the protection of individual rights and freedoms.

## CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

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The 50-minute lesson plan which follows highlights select issues related to the theme of this chapter: governmental responsibilities. Teachers are encouraged to adapt this lesson to the language and content learning needs of their students. Adjustments can easily be made so that the lesson matches the needs of lower or higher proficiency English language learners.

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### Preliminary Lesson Planning

#### *Materials:*

Create two handouts (A and B) from the information provided in [Appendix A](#). Handout A should list major governmental responsibilities (in capital letters in Appendix A). Include only two examples of governmental services that are associated with each governmental responsibility (in lower case letters, immediately following governmental responsibilities, in Appendix A); select governmental services that will assist students in understanding the governmental responsibility associated with them. Leave space on the handout for students to fill in additional services for each responsibility. A suggested format is as follows:

Major governmental responsibilities	Related governmental services
1. Cultural resources	1. Museums, theaters
2. Public safety	2. Police, fire fighters

In Handout B, list all remaining services ([Appendix A](#)) in random order or in alphabetical order.

When creating Handouts A and B, delete items from Appendix A that are irrelevant to your country and add items in both categories -- governmental responsibilities and services -- that are pertinent to your country.

#### *Student grouping decisions:*

Decide on procedures for grouping students for Activities 1 and 2. Participants will remain in the same groups for both activities. It is recommended that groups have no more than six participants each. If appropriate, make up tentative lists of group members. Make last minute adjustments when it is determined which students are actually in class.

*Vocabulary considerations:*

Consider the vocabulary that students need to know to complete the lesson successfully. Determine which vocabulary items the students already know and which items they will need to have explained. Time has been allotted in Activity 1 for a discussion of key vocabulary. Some important terms, and their definitions, are included in a glossary in [Appendix B](#). Items listed in the glossary are written in bold print the first time that they are mentioned in the lesson plan.

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### Warm Up Activity (5 minutes)

*Purpose:*

- To stimulate student interest in the topic of governmental responsibilities
- To draw upon students' background knowledge
- To give students the opportunity to express their opinions to others

*Procedures:*

1. Ask students to listen to the following questions. (Emphasize the word "without" when reading the first question to the class.): Can you imagine living in a place **without** a government? What would it be like?
2. Ask students to take out a piece of paper. Give students one minute to work individually to jot down as many ideas as possible in response to the questions. (They can do this as a list of relevant words and phrases or a short free write). Remind students that there are no right or wrong answers. If necessary, repeat the questions and/or expand upon the questions to guide student responses (e.g., What services would we lose? What would be missing in everyday life? What would we gain? What would be better? Worse?).
3. Ask students in pairs to share ideas about living in a place without a government. Give students two minutes to share their ideas. (Ask students to do this orally; they can use their notes as references, but they should not simply hand their papers to their partners.)
4. Ask students to share a few of their ideas with the rest of the class. Write two types of student responses on the blackboard: Words characterizing major areas of governmental responsibility (e.g., items in capital letters in [Appendix A](#)) and governmental services (e.g., items in lower case letters in [Appendix A](#)) which serve as examples of different responsibilities. Include student contributions that are not listed in [Appendix A](#), but are appropriate to the discussion to follow.
5. (Do not erase the blackboard.)

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### Transition from Warm Up to Activity #1

Briefly summarize students' conclusions about living without a government. Make a point of emphasizing responses that focus on services that the average citizen would lose in a society without government. Tell students that the class session will be devoted to exploring a range of governmental responsibilities.

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### Activity #1 (approximately 15-20 minutes)

#### *Purpose:*

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way
- To give students the chance to use key vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme of the lesson
- To give students the chance to build their vocabularies and see relationships among words in semantic groups
- To raise students' consciousness about governmental responsibilities and services

#### *Procedure:*

1. Ask students to form groups. Give each group one copy of Handout A and one copy of Handout B. Ask groups to look at Handout A and consider the major governmental responsibilities listed on the left side of the handout. Make sure students understand the meaning of each governmental responsibility. If necessary, use the two examples listed to the right of each category to help students understand the differences among the categories.
2. Ask students to look at the governmental services listed randomly on Handout B. Ask them to transfer the items on Handout B to the appropriate categories on Handout A. Give students 8-10 minutes to finish this task. (Tell students that some items listed on Handout B might fit into several governmental responsibility categories.)
3. While students are working in groups, circulate to keep students on task and to assist them with necessary vocabulary. Ask groups that finish early to brainstorm additional services for already existing categories and/or to add entirely new categories to their handout.

Return to the blackboard occasionally to add major "governmental responsibility" categories to the list started during the warm-up activity. Before the class moves to the next part of the lesson, write all categories listed on Handout A on the blackboard.

4. Review group deliberations. If possible, ask student volunteers to come to the blackboard to add services to different "governmental responsibility" categories. Assign one student to each category. If space does not permit such student participation at the blackboard, fill in major categories on the blackboard with students' oral responses as you move from one category to another.

Encourage students to cross check responses on the blackboard with responses on their handout.

5. If time permits, ask students if any important categories or services are missing on the blackboard. Add student responses to the blackboard.

(Do not erase the blackboard. Students may want to refer back to it in the next activity.)

## Activity #2 (approximately 20 minutes)

### *Purpose:*

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way
- To reinforce key vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme of the lesson
- To give students the opportunity to make and defend judgments about different governmental responsibilities

### *Procedures:*

1. Ask students to continue working in the same groups. Ask students to consider their lists of governmental responsibilities and services that are on the blackboard and on their completed Handout A. Put the following instructions on the blackboard.
  - A. Identify the five most important governmental responsibilities.
  - B. Rank your choices from 1 to 5 with 1 equal to "most important."
  - C. Write down a rationale for your decisions.
  - D. Be prepared to defend your decisions with real-life explanations.

Remind students that every group member should be able to report on A, B, C, and D.

If necessary, model a response by identifying one governmental responsibility that you consider a high priority. Provide a rationale for your decision, accompanied by a real-life explanation. For example, you might tell students that you think that education is a critical governmental responsibility and that without an educated population, society cannot progress and meet the challenges of the future. In general, a more educated, literate population tends to be healthier and more affluent.

If time is limited, ask groups to identify three priorities rather than five.

2. Give students up to 10 minutes to formulate their responses. Circulate to keep students on task.
3. Ask for three volunteers from each group. Volunteer #1 should report the responsibility that the group considered most important (the item ranked #1) by the group. Volunteer #2 should provide a rationale for the group's first choice. Volunteer #3 should defend the group's first choice with a real-life explanation

## Cool Down Activity (approximately 5 minutes)

### *Purpose:*

- To provide some closure to lesson
- To give students an opportunity to discuss opening class question for a second time

### *Procedures:*

1. Ask students to turn to a nearby classmate and reconsider the issues raised at the beginning of class: Would you rather live in a place with a government or without a government? Why?

2. Ask students to report back any interesting answers to the whole class.

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### **Possible Extensions to Lesson**

1. Ask students any of these questions to extend the lesson.
  - a. What other responsibilities do governments have?
  - b. What can governments do to respect and protect individual rights and individual freedoms?
  - c. Why is it difficult for a government to meet all of its responsibilities?
  - d. How can governments ensure that all people, not just a few, benefit from governmental laws and policies?
  - e. In your opinion, what is the main purpose of government?
  - f. Should powers of governments be limited? Why? Why not?
2. Ask students to list and present arguments in favor of and against limited government.
3. It is said that one of the main responsibilities of governments is the promotion of common good," that is the promotion of the general welfare of all individuals and groups. Why is this responsibility so challenging?
4. Government has been defined as "people and groups within a society with the authority to make, carry out, and enforce laws and to manage disputes about them." Do you like this definition? If so, why? If not, how would you define government?
5. Ask student groups to create posters highlighting five of the most important governmental responsibilities and rationales for their decisions. Posters can then be displayed around the walls of the classroom.
6. Refer to the web sites listed in the next section of this chapter for more information and lesson planning ideas.

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## Appendix A

### Governmental Responsibilities and Services

*Governmental responsibilities are listed in all capital letters on the left; associated services are listed in lower case letters to the right of each major responsibility. The lists should not be considered all inclusive. Teachers should adjust entries so that they are pertinent to their countries.*

BUSINESS AND **TRADE**: Bank regulations, monetary regulations, in-country and out-of-country commerce, price controls

CITY PLANNING: Zoning for businesses, housing, schools, public libraries, parks, green spaces; road maintenance, snow removal

CULTURAL RESOURCES: Museums, theaters, dance/ballet, music, art, preservation of historic buildings and landmarks

EDUCATION: School buildings, universities, vocational schools, school libraries, teacher training, teacher certification, teacher supervision, grade-level standards, curricula, textbooks, national exams

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS: Television, radio, telephones, telegraph, post office, the Internet

PROTECTION OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS: Freedom of expression (speech, press, religion, assembly, conscience), freedom from discrimination, right to privacy, right to an education, right to vote, etc.

PUBLIC HEALTH: Health care, disease control, hospitals and clinics, ambulances, food inspection, drug regulations, inoculations, regulations about air and water pollution, family planning, vehicle inspections, garbage collection, toxic waste disposal

PUBLIC SAFETY: Police, fire fighters, military forces, jails and prisons, courts, judges, street lighting, traffic laws

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: Highways, roads, traffic lights, road signs, buses, subways, trains, airports, harbors

PUBLIC UTILITIES: Electricity, gas, water, sewage

PUBLIC WELFARE: Social security; assistance for the unemployed, the disabled, the handicapped, and injured workers; childcare

RECORD KEEPING: Births, deaths, passports, immigration, voter registration, taxes

RECREATION: City parks, sports facilities, national parks, after-school activities

WORKER PROTECTION: Labor laws, child labor laws, controls about unsafe working conditions, laws to protect workers from discrimination and harassment

[Glossary](#)