

# Branch Battle Game Overview

## Teacher Resource

### Resource Overview

This document provides teacher resources for implementing Branches Battle in the classroom. The **Game Overview** section includes detailed instructions for setup and gameplay, while the **Building Narrative Around Gameplay** section offers talking points and sample dialogue to help facilitate the game.

As the teacher, your primary roles during the game are to guide student play, determine which actions are permissible in the game, and narrate connections between gameplay and real-world concepts such as the branches of government and the system of checks and balances. With thoughtful preparation, *Branches Battle* becomes an engaging simulation that helps students grasp essential civics and government principles.

This game is ideal for use once students have a working knowledge of the three branches of government and separation of powers. If you intend to plan this game at the beginning of the *Civic and Constitutional Life* Unit, we suggest reading The Constitutional System Essay before starting the game.

### Table of Contents

Game Overview .....	2
Objective .....	2
Game Materials .....	2
Setup .....	2
Gameplay .....	3
1. Decide teams and review the rules .....	3
2. Reveal the first action card .....	3
3. Other Branches Can Challenge .....	3
4. Crisis Cards (High Stakes!) .....	4
5. Scoring and Outcome .....	4
Example Turn .....	4
Building Narrative Around Gameplay .....	5

Step-by-Step Method for Building Narrative .....	5
Research and AI Prompts to Generate Real-World Parallels.....	5
Optional Discussion Questions for Deeper Connection .....	6
More Teacher Prompts to Build Narrative .....	6
Tips for Success.....	6

## Game Overview

A whole-group classroom game that challenges students to successfully navigate the policy-making process by passing laws, executing orders, and reviewing actions — while maintaining the balance of power among the three branches of government.

### Objective

Winning Condition: The branch with the most points wins.

### Game Materials

- Branch Reference Cards – Each team (Legislative, Executive, Judicial) gets a reference card outlining their specific powers and possible actions.
- **Game Slide Deck** – Includes student facing instructions, actions slides, challenge slides, and crisis slides to play the game.
- **Dice** – Used to determine the outcome of actions and challenges. 1 per team or digital.
- **Board Score Tracker** – Tracks successful and failed actions to reflect the running score. Use the classroom board or chart paper.

### Setup

1. Divide students into three teams: **Legislative, Executive, Judicial**.
2. Give each team a **Branch Reference Card**, or one per student, outlining their powers and role.
3. Prepare the Game slide deck on the classroom smartboard or projector.
4. Create a score-keeping area on a piece of chart paper or the classroom whiteboard. Be sure it is somewhere that all students can see.

**Teacher note:** Assign or ask for a student volunteer to be your scorekeeper so you can focus on running the game slide deck.

# Gameplay

## 1. Decide teams and review the rules

- Split the class into 3 branches: Executive, Judicial, and Legislative.
- Use the rule slides and example turn slides to go over how the game functions.

## 2. Reveal the first action card

- The teacher reveals the first **Action Slide** and reads it aloud.
- The relevant branch (based on the action) must respond:
  - If it's a legislative action → Legislative team decides whether to pass or block it.
  - If it's an executive action → Executive team decides to sign, veto, or amend it.
  - If it's a judicial action → Judicial team decides whether to uphold or strike down the action.
- Students must be sure the action is in their power. If a group jumps in to respond and it is not their power, they lose a point.
- Each slide has an assigned point value that the responding team collects when choosing the action.
  - For each action slide, there is an option that can be challenged, and an option that cannot be challenged.

**Teacher note:** The slides are animated to display step-by-step in presentation mode. Students will first see the action and points options, followed by an icon, and finally the correct branch. Use this progression to prompt student responses and adjust the level of support based on each class or team's needs.

## 3. Other Branches Can Challenge

- If the relevant branch chooses the option that can be challenged, other teams can respond using their powers:
  - **Legislative Powers** – Override a veto or amend a bill.
  - **Executive Powers** – Veto a bill or issue an executive order.
  - **Judicial Powers** – Declare an action unconstitutional or uphold it.
- To challenge, the responding team declares what power they are using (it must make sense), and rolls the die:
  - **1–2:** Challenge fails, lose points.
  - **3–4:** Challenge partially succeeds each branch gets one point.

- o **5–6:** Challenge succeeds — action overturned or upheld, the challenging team gets the points.

**Teacher note:** As the teacher, you will decide what challenges are acceptable. Use your own knowledge of government powers, reference cards, or teacher script to inform your decisions.

#### 4. Crisis Cards (High Stakes!)

- Every 4 turns, a **Crisis Card** is revealed (e.g., "Military Conflict," "Natural Disaster," "Government Shutdown").
- The branches must work together to resolve the crisis:
  - o (Roll dice x total points) to determine the success of the resolution.
  - o The Crisis Cards become progressively more difficult. When the total points times the dice rolled don't survive the crisis, the game ends.
  - o The group with the most points at the end of the game wins.

#### 5. Scoring and Outcome

- Earn points for successfully passing and executing actions.
  - o Students earn points for actions even if they are challenged by another team.
- Lose points for failed challenge actions, based on the directions on the slide and the roll of the dice.
- The team with the highest score at the end wins — unless the government collapses due to instability!

#### Example Turn

1. Reveals Action Slide: "Pass a healthcare law."
2. Legislative team decides to pass it → Executive team chooses to veto.
3. Legislative team uses a **Challenge Card** to override → Rolls a 4 → Veto override succeeds!
4. Judicial team then plays a challenge to strike down the law → Rolls a 2 → Law stands.
5. Legislative and Executive teams gain points for successfully passing and executing an action.

# Building Narrative Around Gameplay

## Step-by-Step Method for Building Narrative

### 1. Pause After the Action Is Chosen

Before awarding points, take 15–30 seconds to narrate the choice:

- “The Legislative Branch has passed a new bill. What happens next in the real world?”

### 2. Highlight the Civic Connection

Use prompts like:

- “Why is this power important for that branch?”
- “What does this look like in real life?”
- “This relates to what we have discussed in class because...”

### 3. Play Out a Quick Scenario to Keep Gameplay Moving

- “Congress passes a bill expanding internet access. Now the President has a choice—sign it or veto it.”

### 4. Invite Student Reflection or Challenge

- “Should the President veto that kind of bill? Why or why not?”
- “Which branch could check this decision—and how?”

## Research and AI Prompts to Generate Real-World Parallels

Preview the slides before facilitating the game and imagine what you might say to students about that governing action. If nothing comes to mind, you might consider researching or using a generative AI tool to generate relevant scenarios to have on hand during game play.

### Prompt Example:

- *Give me a real-world example of the executive branch vetoing legislation related to healthcare.*
- *What’s an example of the judicial branch declaring a law unconstitutional?*

## Optional Discussion Questions for Deeper Connection

Moment	Ask Students...
After a team makes a move	“Why was that action appropriate for your branch?”
During a challenge	“What would this kind of conflict look like in real government?”
After a failed or successful check	“What does this tell us about how power is limited in our system?”
At the crisis slide	“How can cooperation between branches solve national problems?”

## More Teacher Prompts to Build Narrative

- “Let’s imagine this is happening in real life. Who would be involved?”
- “Why do you think the Constitution gave this branch that power?”
- “What might happen if this branch *didn’t* do its job?”
- “Can another branch step in here? How?”

## Tips for Success

- Use real-world headlines or examples when possible based on content you have covered in your classroom (e.g., *The Supreme Court overturned...*, Congress passed...).
- Keep it brief—one sentence of context can spark meaningful thought.
- Encourage students to use their reference cards as evidence when debating or reflecting.
- Be patient with your students and yourself. Trying a new game can be challenging; it will get easier with each class you teach.

