

Our Democracy: Government

Activity: Balanced Government

Watch:

- [3 branches of government](#) (Kids Academy)

Play:

- [Branch-o-mania](#) (Ben's Guide to the U.S. Government)
- [Branches of Power](#): Learn to control all 3 branches of the U.S. government! (iCivics, free registration required)
- [Checks and Balances](#) (BrainPOP)

Listen:

- [Who Makes the Laws?](#) (But Why? A Podcast for Curious Kids)

Get kids thinking

Mobiles often look effortless as they balance gracefully in the air. But balancing anything — whether it is a mobile or the powers of government — is hard work! Help kids learn more about balance in our government when you make a mobile together that represents its three branches.

Supplies

- Scissors
- Yarn or twine
- Rubber bands
- Three sticks that are roughly the same length (20 inches long is a good size). Choose sticks with several twigs in the middle of the stick. Use bamboo skewers if you can't find sticks.
- Construction paper
- Crayons and markers
- A computer and printer (optional)

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Let's get started!

Head outside to collect some sticks. While you and your kids are looking for sticks, talk about the various meanings and usage of the word branch — it's not just the limb of a tree! Relate the word back to the nonfiction book you read together and explain how "branch" is used to describe a related part of a larger system — such as a branch library or the three branches of government.

Bring your three sticks inside and have the kids arrange them into a triangle with the ends of the sticks overlapping. Arrange the sticks so that any short twigs are on the outside edges of the triangle. While the kids are working, talk about how the federal government has three branches that share the power, privilege and responsibility of running the government.

Cut a length of yarn that is twice as long as one of the sticks. With one end of the yarn lash two sticks together. Use the other end of the yarn to lash the next corner of the base of the triangle.

Cut another length of yarn that is twice as long as the sticks. Use one end to lash the remaining sticks together. Pull the remaining yarn through the center point of the first yarn length you tied. Pull all the yarn pieces up together and you should have a pyramid. Secure a knot in the top of the pyramid and use the remaining yarn tail for hanging the mobile.

Give the kids construction paper to create "leaves" to describe each branch of the government. On the leaves, kids can draw pictures that illustrate or symbolize the branches, write information about what each branch does, and include the roles and people involved in each branch.

Children may want to go beyond the book(s) you read together to see and learn more the branches of government. The White House website's section [Branches of Government](#) has descriptions, photos and links to all the branches. Kids can also write additional facts on the leaves and print out and glue photos.

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Let the kids arrange their leaves for each branch and help secure them to the twigs using tape or by tying leaves with yarn to the branches. Talk about how our Constitution uses “checks and balances” to keep any one branch from having too much power. Encourage the kids to make sure their mobiles are also balanced!

To learn more about how to make mobiles balance, see the [Balance the Forces Within a Mobile](#) project (with video) at the Science Buddies website.

Suggest to the kids that they can add more to the mobile as you continue to read more about our government.





