**A Very Big Branch**

**Time Needed:** One class period

**Materials Needed:**
- Student worksheets
- Projector / Transparencies

**Copy Instructions:**
- Reading (2 pages; class set)
- Worksheet (2 pages; class set)

**Learning Objectives.** Students will be able to:
- Explain the roles and responsibilities of executive departments and the president’s cabinet.
- Describe how executive departments and agencies enforce governmental policies.
- Examine regulatory agencies and their social, economic, and political impact on the country.

**STEP BY STEP**

- **ANTICIPATE** by asking students if they know the different ways the government is involved in their day-to-day lives.
- **DISTRIBUTE** the reading pages to the class.
- **READ** together with the class, pausing to discuss and explain as appropriate.
- **CHECK** for understanding by doing the true/false active participation activity with the class.
- **PROJECT** the alphabet soup activity. Use pieces of paper to cover up the acronyms.
- **REVEAL** each acronym on its own. Call on the entire class to guess the acronym. Give clues to the students if they get stuck (e.g. Do you see any patterns? What word does the “D” usually stand for? Is the “D” word always included in the acronym?) Use each question as an opportunity for discussion and review.
- **DISTRIBUTE** the worksheets to the class. Review the instructions with students.
- **ASSIGN** students to complete the activities.
- **REVIEW** the answers to the worksheet if you wish.
- **CLOSE** by writing these four words on the board: President, executive, cabinet, departments. Ask students to construct a sentence that uses all four words (in any order). Have students share their sentences with a partner, and then randomly call on students to share their partner’s sentence with the class.
**A Very Big Branch**

**We’ve Got a Job to Do**

The job of the executive branch is to carry out the laws that the legislative branch passes. When you think of the executive branch, you probably think of the president. But the president is only the head of the executive branch. He is like the tip of the iceberg: underneath, there is a giant organization with lots of people doing many different jobs. In fact, the executive branch is the largest branch of our government!

**Help From Many**

Most of the executive branch is made up of departments and independent agencies. **Departments** are the main organizations in the executive branch. There are 15 departments, and each one focuses on a specific type of activity such as education, transportation, defense, or energy. Each department has smaller agencies that do specific jobs. For example, the Department of Justice (DOJ) operates our justice system and works to prevent crime. Two agencies inside the DOJ are the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The FBI investigates certain kinds of crimes, while the DEA deals with crime related to drugs and controlled substances.

The president appoints a **secretary** to lead each department. (But the head of the Department of Justice is called the Attorney General (AG)). These department heads make up the president’s **cabinet**, which acts as a group of advisors to the president. They help the president make important decisions about how laws should be carried out.

**Independent agencies** are government organizations that also focus on specific issues, but they are different from departments because they are independent of the president’s control. Instead, these agencies are controlled by a board or commission. The president can appoint someone to the board or commission but cannot remove them.

**Carrying Out Laws: Enforcement**

What does it mean to “carry out” a law? That depends on the kind of law that needs to be carried out. Some laws make things illegal and describe consequences for those who do those things. Executive agencies **enforce** the law when someone isn’t following it. There are several things an agency can do to enforce a law:

- Educate the public about new laws
- Monitor the public to make sure laws are being followed
- Catch individuals or organizations not following the law
- Take the offenders to court
- Follow any other enforcement procedures the agency may have
Carrying Out Laws: Regulations

Other laws are just instructions about something that must be done, such as installing new security procedures at the nation’s airports. A law like this will not include every last detail about how it should be carried out. Instead, the law will authorize the executive branch to decide these details. The rules the executive branch makes about how the law will be carried out are called regulations. Regulations have power similar to laws. Some regulations make activity illegal, and others give instructions for how something must be done.

Agencies Enforce and Regulate

Most departments and agencies both enforce laws and make regulations. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is an independent agency whose goal is to protect the environment and human health. It carries out laws passed by Congress, such as the Clean Air Act that is designed to limit air pollution. The Clean Air Act authorizes the EPA to set limits on how much pollution can be put into the air. To do this, the EPA issues regulations that say exactly how much pollution vehicles, factories, and other sources can put into the air. The EPA then works to enforce these regulations. Violating them can result in penalties.

Maintaining Order and Safety

We depend on many parts of the executive branch to keep us safe and to keep order. For example, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is responsible for protecting the United States against all kinds of threats. It includes agencies that deal with terrorism, natural disasters, and border protection. It even includes the Secret Service, whose agents protect the president! Inside the DHS, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) responds to natural disasters to help people get the help they need in an orderly way. The Coast Guard, also part of DHS, patrols our nation’s coastlines to watch for threats and help boats in distress.

Busy, Busy

Remember that most of the day-to-day activity in the executive branch involves ordinary people doing the work that needs to be done: an FBI agent conducts an investigation, a soldier participates in training exercises, or a worker monitors a nuclear reactor at an energy plant. The executive branch needs people to answer phones, program computers, file papers, do scientific research, process mail, fly airplanes, and clean bathrooms. In fact, the federal government is the nation’s largest employer, and most of those jobs are in the executive branch.
True/False Active Participation Review

Directions: Read each statement aloud to the class. Have the class respond in unison either by answering “true” or “false” as a chorus or by showing you “thumbs up” for true and “thumbs down” for false. Watch or listen for wrong or mixed answers, indicating confusion. Use each statement as an opportunity to quickly reinforce and discuss the concept before moving on.

1. The executive branch is only the president. (F — The branch also includes many departments and agencies.)

2. Each government department has a leader called a secretary. (T)

3. The 15 department heads are all part of the president’s cabinet. (T)

4. The president’s cabinet is a group of people who guard the president. (F — The cabinet members advise the president.)

5. Government agencies only make rules; they can’t enforce rules. (F — Agencies make rules, or regulations, and they have the power to enforce them.)

6. Some parts of the executive branch are businesses the government owns. (T — These are called government corporations.)

7. The president has total control over independent agencies. (F — Independent agencies are controlled by boards; the president can’t remove board members after they are appointed.)

8. Enforcing laws can include educating the public, catching lawbreakers, and taking people to court. (T)

9. When Congress passes a law, the law includes every detail about how it must be carried out. (F — Laws usually do not include all the details. The executive branch decides those.)

10. Most of the work done in the executive branch is done by the president. (F — Most of the work is done by ordinary people employed by executive departments.)

11. Regulations are executive branch rules that have the power of laws. (T — Congress authorizes the executive branch to make regulations, usually to decide the details of how a law will be carried out.)

12. A big role of the executive branch is to keep the nation safe. (T — Departments involved include the Department of Defense and the Dep’t of Homeland Security.)
Alphabet Soup
You saw some acronyms in the reading. Can you remember what these stand for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOJ</th>
<th>FBI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEA</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPA</td>
<td>DHS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMA</td>
<td>DoD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did you notice any patterns? See if you can figure out which agencies these are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DoE</th>
<th>DoEd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HHS</td>
<td>HUD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA</td>
<td>CIA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Very Big Branch

A. Cabinet Departments. Use the word bank to fill in the missing words from the graphic organizer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attorney</th>
<th>armed</th>
<th>basic needs</th>
<th>college</th>
<th>highway</th>
<th>countries</th>
<th>farmers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>military</td>
<td>homes</td>
<td>money</td>
<td>fuel</td>
<td>public lands</td>
<td>wages</td>
<td>terrorists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The President’s Cabinet

Executive Branch Departments

**SECRETARY OF STATE**
Department of State
Manages our relationships with foreign ________

**SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY**
Department of the Treasury
Collects taxes, prints ________
deals with the nation’s finances

**SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**
Department of Defense
Manages the ________ forces
and conducts wars overseas

**SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE**
Department of Agriculture
Works with ________
and regulates farm products

**SECRETARY OF COMMERCE**
Department of Commerce
Supervises ________
and promotes U.S. businesses

**SECRETARY OF LABOR**
Department of Labor
Helps workers get fair ________
and working conditions

**SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**
Department of Transportation
Oversees ________
safety and air, rail, and sea travel

**SECRETARY OF ENERGY**
Department of Energy
Researches sources of ________
and electricity for the nation

**SECRETARY OF EDUCATION**
Department of Education
Gives money for K-12 schools and
student ________ loans

**SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**
Department of Veterans Affairs
Provides services for people who
served in the ________

**SEC. OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**
Dep’t of Health & Human Services
Gives services for Americans’ health
and ________

**SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY**
Department of Homeland Security
Protects against ________
and other threats

**SEC. OF HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT**
Dep’t of Housing & Urban Development
Creates strong communities and
affordable ________

B. Who Said That? Identify which secretary might give the following advice or information:

1) “Mr. President, we need to invest in more solar electricity.”
   Sec. of ________

2) “Mr. President, we saw a decrease in highway deaths this year.”
   Sec. of ________

3) “Mr. President, agents intercepted a terrorist threat this morning.”
   Sec. of ________

4) “Mr. President, it’s time to take the penny out of circulation.”
   Sec. of ________

5) “Mr. President, we need to combat bark beetles in the national forest.”
   Sec. of ________

Worksheet n. 1