

“Who Should I Turn to?”



Figuring Out Federal Functions

Civics 1
Grades 6-8

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“I have sought for a middle ground which may at once support a due supremacy of the national authority, and not exclude the local authorities wherever they can be subordinately useful.”

James Madison (April 16, 1787)

Letter to George Washington

Rationale: An effective citizen should have some understanding of the level of government to which one might turn when problems or needs arise. One approach might be to have students memorize the functions of the different levels of government. This lesson assumes that no learner wants to memorize the tedious and confusing functions of government and that an understanding of the logic behind assigning functions will serve them better as they will be able to reason out where they might turn in time of need.

Audience: Grades 6-8.

Benchmark Addressed: Students will analyze the different functions of federal, state, and local governments in the United States and examine the reasons for the different organizational structures each level of government employs.

Assessment:

Content: The term *function* which appears in Civics Standard 1 may be defined as “the action for which a person or thing is particularly fitted or employed.” The Constitution lays out a federal structure of government in which power is diffused among different levels – national (federal), state, and local. Recent data provided by the Census Bureau shows that there are now over 87,500 governments operating in the United States. Consequently, the task of figuring out where to turn when one faces a problem that calls for government action is usually quite confusing. Citizens are clearly at an advantage if they understand which level of government is responsible for addressing the various problems or needs that they might encounter.

Two related challenges posed by our complex federal system involve: a) figuring out which level of government has which powers and, b) figuring out which level of government is responsible for which services.

Civics standard 1 anticipates that students will be able to explain reasons why different levels of government have different responsibilities. As the Civics section of the Delaware Social Studies Clarification document suggests, “essentially,” the differences in responsibilities “arise from the differences in needs addressed.” It goes on to suggest that, “Generally stated, the functions of the national government include national defense, monetary policy, and foreign representation. Infrastructure, protection from crime, welfare, education, and other practical needs are more clearly the responsibility of state governments. Sewage, garbage, culture, urban development, and traffic control are usually the tasks of local government.”

The answer to the question, “which level does what?” is not always clear cut as the functions of the different levels of government in the United States frequently

overlap. In fact, the American federal system is often misunderstood because of textbooks that attempt to simplify this complex system and because the nature of our federal system has changed over time while understandings have not.

Visual analogies offer memorable images of contrasting conceptions of American federalism. One such analogy involves cake. The layer cake image of federalism offers a traditional conception and suggests that responsibilities, powers, and functions are neatly divided among the levels of government. Indeed, this analogy holds in some instances (e.g. representation abroad). In many situations, however, the American federal system is more like a marble cake in that responsibilities, powers, and functions tend to overlap between levels (e.g. education). A student who possesses a deep understanding of our federal system recognizes and can explain the complexity of the system that is suggested by the marble cake analogy.

Essential Questions: [from Delaware Department of Education’s Clarification Document]

- Why might different needs be addressed by different levels of government?
- What different needs should be addressed by the different levels of government?

Materials Needed

- Overhead projector.
- Transparency marker.
- Resource 1: *Criteria for Determining Functions*
- Resource 2a: *Analyzing Functions* – class copies plus transparency.
- Resource 2b: *Figuring Out Functions* – class copies.
- Resource 3a: *Analyzing Functions of Government* – class copies plus transparency.
- Resource 3b *Figuring Out Functions of Government* – class copies.
- Resource 4: *The US Federal System – Layer or Marble Cake?* (transparency).
- Resource 5: *The Federal Structure of the US Government* (transparency).
- Resource 6: *Analytic Tool – Reasoning Through Federalism* (class copies plus transparency).
- Resource 7: Assessment – class copies.

Time to Complete: 1-2 class periods.

Procedures

1. Entry Activity: Distribute 3”x 5” index cards to students as they enter the room. Post the following question on the board or overhead:

If you found something missing from your locker, who would be the best person to help you with your problem: your teacher, the principal, or your parent/guardian? Explain why.

Ask students to write their answers on the index cards and collect them after approximately 90 seconds. Then, ask volunteers to share their responses. Most importantly, ask why they think that the person they selected should be approached to deal with the problem? Record their responses (i.e., criteria) on the board.

2. Define *Function*: Write the word *function* on the board then offer the following definition: “*the action for which a person or thing is particularly fitted or employed.*” Asks students to paraphrase this definition to insure comprehension. Tell the students that the purpose of today’s entry activity was to get them thinking about functions that people might serve and why they might be assigned those functions. In this lesson, we are going to analyze the different functions that people and groups have and why it is important to understand these functions.
3. Whole Group Discussion: Pose the following questions beginning with the prompt... “Between teacher, principal, or parent/guardian...
 - Which of the three has authority over you?
 - Whose responsibilities do you consider to be the most important?
 - Who has authority over the largest number of people?
 - Who has authority over the largest amount of space (e.g., home, classroom, school)?
 - Who do you think has the most resources to address problems or needs? What are some of those resources?
4. Brainstorm in Groups: Tell students that explanations relating to whom one might turn for solutions or services are guided by several common considerations, a few of which they probably just mentioned. Ask the students to work in small groups to come up with a set of criteria that might be used to determine who might be in the best positions to address problems or needs. After 5 minutes or so, ask volunteers to share their criteria.

NOTE: Students may ask who they should be thinking about as they consider criteria. Ideally, they should come up with criteria that might apply to any or group that faces a need or a problem. If you find the students struggling after considerable time elapses (don’t jump in too quickly to solve their problem), offer a sample criterion from [Resource 1: Criteria for Determining Functions](#).
5. Mini-Lecture: Display [Resource 1 \(transparency\): Criteria for Determining Functions](#). Introduce and explain the criteria for determining functions that appear on the transparency (this list should not be considered exhaustive). Ask students to demonstrate their understanding by completing the sentences found in the “Example” boxes under each criterion. For example, after “*Resources*” a student might suggest that a chef might be assigned the function of preparing meals because he or she has the resources needed to cook.
6. Small Group Application (preparing for transfer): Distribute copies of [Resources 2a and 2b](#). Tell students that [Resource 2b](#) contains a list of needs and problems

that people like you might have. Ask them to assume that they have been placed on committees charged with the task of identifying the one person (from the list of teacher, principal, or parent) who would be in the best position to satisfy or resolve each of the needs and problems on the list. Most importantly, they are to explain why they assigned separate functions to the 3 people. Give the “committees” 5-10 minutes to complete the assignment. Then, ask them to share their responses. Project [Resource 2a \(transparency\)](#) on the overhead and fill in appropriate responses with a marker as they are explained by the students.

NOTE TO THE TEACHER: There will be appropriate overlaps in some of the responses as there are in the functions of our local, state, and national governments. Lines separating some functions are often blurred but there should be valid criteria and explanations offered by students.

7. Making Transfer Explicit: Explain to students that *transfer* (visit www.udel.edu/dssep/transfer/transfer.htm) is an important though frequently unfulfilled aim of education. *Transfer* may be viewed as the ability to use what one learns in one situation and apply it or solve problems in a new but similar situation. For example, a student who learns to drive a car uses that understanding to drive a truck. Similarly, a student who learns and applies the concept of “spacing” in a soccer game can provide solid evidence of understanding by transferring that concept successfully in a basketball or field hockey game. Ask students if they can think of other examples of transfers. Then tell them that the next activity is designed to promote transfer.
8. Transfer to Government: Review the structure of government in the United States under the federal system (see [optional Resource 5 transparency](#)). Explain that our government is structured so that power is diffused amongst three levels of government – local, state, and national. Each level of government makes decisions that affect us and each level serves various functions. Ask them to describe any emerging connections to the previous discussions involving the parent/guardian, teacher, and principal and the next one that will involve local, state, and federal government. Are making connections that might be used for transferred?
9. Group Application 2: Distribute copies of [Resources 3a and 3b](#). Tell students that [Resource 3b](#) contains a list of needs and problems that citizens like they might have. Assume that you have been placed on a committee that has been asked to identify the level of government (local, state, or national) that would be in the best position to satisfy or resolve each of the needs and problems on the list. Most importantly, your group should be able to explain why its members think a particular level of government should be assigned each responsibility or function. Tell them to consider the criteria (see [Transparency 1](#)) they applied to the parent, teacher, principal activity. Might the same criteria apply to local, state, and national governments when determining which functions are most appropriate to each level of government? Then, ask students to share their responses. Project

[Resource 3a \(transparency\)](#) on the overhead and fill in appropriate responses with a marker as students explain them.

10. [Resource 3c](#) offers textbook responses for the [Resource 3a](#) activity (Procedure 9 above). Project a copy of [Resource 3c \(transparency\)](#) and give students time to compare and contrast the textbook responses to their own. Ask...
 - Which functions were you able to figure out using the criterion offered in [Resource 1](#)?
 - How might you explain those functions that you did not place successfully?
 - How might citizens be served by an ability to reason out which level of government serves which functions?

11. Visualizing the Complexity - Layer Cake v Marble Cake ([See Resource 4 transparency](#)): Display a layer cake (picture or real) to the students and explain that one conception of federalism suggests that the powers, responsibilities, and functions of government are neatly separated between layers or levels just as the layers of cake are neatly divided in a layer cake. Now, display a marble cake (picture or real) and suggest that, in the United States, the powers, responsibilities, and functions frequently spill over into other levels of government (much as the chocolate in the cake spills over into the vanilla areas). For example, although education has traditionally been assigned functions associated with education, the national government also uses its powers to shape education policies (e.g. No Child Left Behind). [Resource 4](#) offers a diagram contrasting the layer v marble cake images of federalism. Ask the students to describe some advantages (e.g. more resources brought to bear on problems) and disadvantages (e.g. confusion as to which level is ultimately responsible) of each theory of federalism

12. Promoting Transfer – From Marble Cake to _____? _____: invite students to offer alternative analogies that capture either the complexity or the competing theories of federalism. Have them complete the following analogy without using “layer cake” or “marble cake.”

“Federalism is like _____ “

13. Making Federalism Meaningful: Distribute copies of [Resource 6: Analytic Tool: Reasoning Through Federalism](#). Ask students to work in small groups to think about problems or needs that are affecting them individually or their community, and that probably require government solutions. Tell the group to pick one problem or need that appears most pressing and that requires the resources of government. Ask them to layout a problem-solving strategy that includes information gathered from this lesson. Where might they turn to address their problem or need? What criteria emerged as the most influential in determining their course of action?

Consider having the students follow-up on their need or problem by initiating contacts with government officials using the blue pages of the telephone book or the internet (e.g., www.delaware.gov) as resources.

Debrief: Explain the rationale for this lesson (see above). Then, revisit the essential questions for this lesson to address uncertainties and misconceptions. Raise the following questions:

- Why might different needs be addressed by different levels of government?
- What are some different needs that should be addressed by the different levels of government?
- Why might it be important for a citizen to understand the different functions of the three levels of government?

NOTE: In practice, there is no guarantee that a given need or problem will be handled by the level of government that is best suited to deal with it.

Extensions:

1. Have students scan newspapers in class or at home in search of articles that describe the different levels of government performing different functions. Create a 3 column bulletin board with Local, State, and National as headers and create an evolving list of functions as students bring in their articles.
2. Invite elected officials (or members of their staffs) from each of the levels of government into your classroom to discuss how each views the functions of their level and how one level's functions might overlap with another's.
3. Delaware labor laws state that "Minors 14-15 years of age shall not work more than four (4) hours per day on school days."
(www.delawareworks.com/industrialaffairs/services/LaborLawEnforcementInfo.shtml#child) Federal law states that "Permissible work hours for 14- and 15-year-olds are 3 hours on a school day."
(www.dol.gov/dol/topic/youthlabor/workhours.htm). Use this as a springboard into Civics Standard 4. Have the students propose a change in one of the laws and submit their proposal to the appropriate level of government.

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Cummings, Milton C. and Wise, David (2001). *Democracy Under Pressure: An Introduction to the American Political System*. Harcourt College Publishers. Philadelphia.

Edwards, George C., Wattenberg, Martin P. & Lineberry, Robert L. (2004) *Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy*. Pearson Longman. New York.

- National Standards for Civics and Government. (1994) Center for Civic Education. Calabassas, CA.
- State of Delaware Social Studies Curriculum Framework. Volume One Content Standards June 1995 www.doe.k12.de.us/programs/pcs/socialstudies.shtml

Resource 1

Criteria for Determining Functions

- **Resources**: one person or group has more or better resources to solve the problem or satisfy the need.

Example: A _____ might be assigned the function of _____ because he or she has most, if not all, of the *resources* needed to fulfill that function.

- **Proximity or Connectedness**: one person or group is closer to the problem, understands it better, and/or is able to respond more quickly and appropriately.

Example: A _____ might be assigned the function of _____ because he or she is closer to the problem and probably understands it better

- **Burden**: small problems are better handled by those with smaller or fewer responsibilities so that those with more problems or responsibilities are not burdened with relatively “little things.”

Example: A _____ might be assigned the function of _____ because he or she has relatively few responsibilities and others have more important things to worry about.

(continued)

- Scope: the problem or need has the potential for affecting many different people over large areas (or few people in a very limited area).

Example: A _____ might be assigned the function of _____ because so the need or problem is experienced by many people living in a large area.

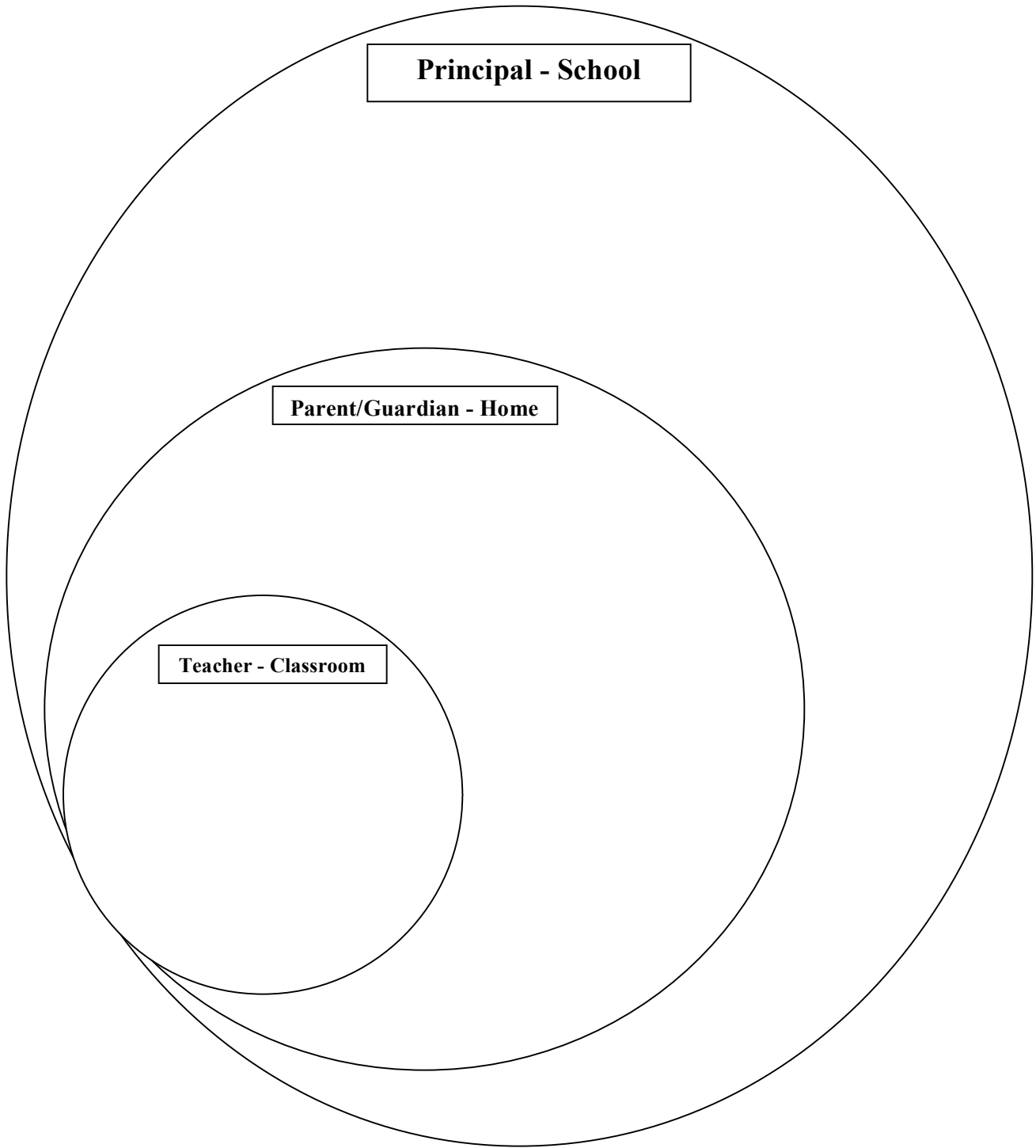
- Tradition, Precedent, or Custom. Sometimes a person or group has a function because they were the first ones to take on that function and it makes sense to let that person continue with it.

Example: A _____ might be have the function of _____ because he or she was the first to have it and it makes sense to let that person continue having it.

- Authority: Sometimes decisions about who should be responsible for satisfying needs or dealing with problems are determined by whether someone has authority over those affected by the need or problem.

Example: A _____ might have the function of _____ because he or she has the most authority over those who are affected by the need or problem.

Resource 2a
Analyzing Functions of Principals, Teachers and
Parents/Guardians



Resource 2b

Figuring Out Functions

Directions: Work in small groups to decide whether a parent, teacher, or principal would be in the best position to fulfill each of the following “functions.” Write your responses in the blank circles found on Handout 1a.

1. To take care of you when you are sick.
2. To decide which school you will attend.
3. To protect you from bullies in the cafeteria.
4. To decorate a bulletin board.
5. To maintain order in a classroom.
6. To purchase chalk, erasers, overhead projectors, and paper.
7. To repair your television.
8. To hire coaches for your school team or club.
9. To clothe you.
10. To clean your house.
11. To evaluate your performance.
12. To provide you with transportation to school.
13. To educate you.
14. To determine your teachers’ salaries.
15. To resolve conflicts between you and a student from a different schools.
16. To prepare lessons for your social studies class.
17. To feed you.
18. To decide which school you will attend.

Resource 2a: For the Teacher

Sample Responses

Principal

- To protect you from bullies in the cafeteria.
- To purchase chalk, erasers, overhead projectors, and paper.
- To hire coaches for your school team or club.
- To provide you with transportation to school.
- To determine your teachers' salaries.
- To resolve conflicts between you and a student from a different schools.

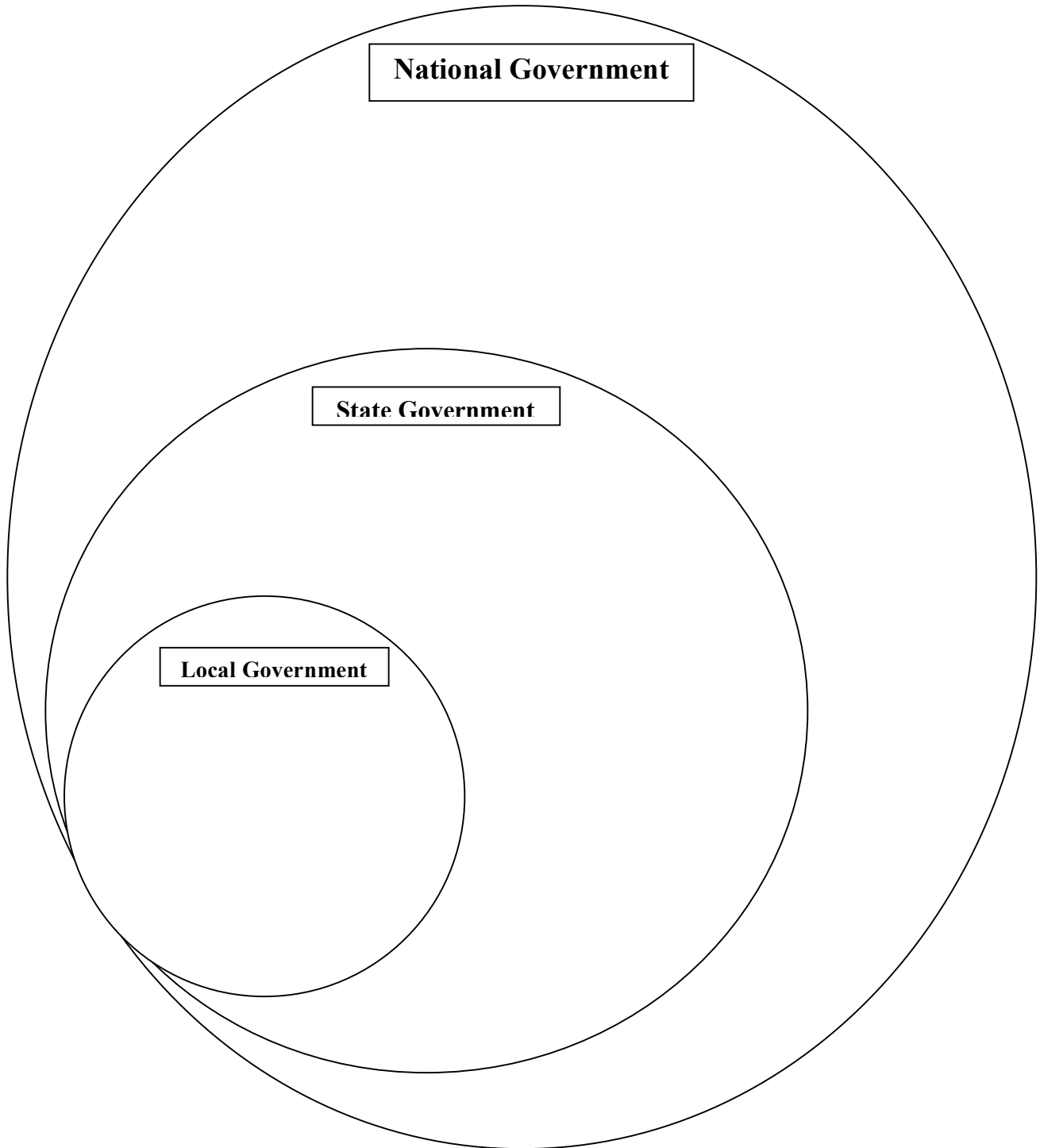
Teacher

- To educate you.
- To decorate a bulletin board.
- To maintain order in a classroom.
- To evaluate your performance.
- To prepare lessons for your social studies class.

Parent/Guardian

- To clothe you.
- To repair your television.
- To take care of you when you are sick.
- To feed you.
- To clean your house.
- To decide which school you will attend.

Resource 3a:
Analyzing Functions of Local, State, and National Government



Resource 3b

Figuring Out Functions

Directions: Work in small groups to decide whether a parent, teacher, or principal would be in the best position to fulfill each of the following “functions.” Write your responses in the blank circles found on Handout 1a.

1. To keep people safe from speeding cars (speed limits).
2. To dispose of sewage.
3. To protect people from robbers.
4. To be protected from foreign invasion or threats
5. To fill a pothole in the street outside your house.
6. To make sure that my money keeps its value wherever I go.
7. To keep traffic moving in an orderly manner.
8. To decide who might get married legally.
9. To explain our policies to the rest of the world.
10. To put out fires.
11. To resolve disputes between states.
12. To build schools and educate young people.
13. To repair underground water pipes.
14. To manage the flow of immigrants into the country.
15. To ensure that food and medicines are safe.
16. To build roads.
17. To pick up garbage.
18. To organize community celebrations.
19. To make sure that the economy is safe from recessions or depressions.
20. To make cities attractive places to live.
21. To decide who might get married legally.
22. To keep traffic moving in an orderly manner.

Resource 3c

(Teacher Resource)

Functions of the Different Levels

- **Functions of National Government (examples from the Clarification Document):**
“national defense, monetary policy, and foreign representation.”

Other examples

To be protected from foreign invasion or threats
To make sure that my money keeps its value wherever I go.
To explain our policies to the rest of the world.
To resolve disputes between states.
To manage the flow of immigrants into the country.
To ensure that food and medicines are safe.
To make sure that the economy is safe from recessions or depressions.

- **Functions of State Government (examples from the Clarification Document):**
Infrastructure, protection from crime, welfare, education, and other practical needs...

Other examples

To protect people from robbers.
To build schools and educate young people.
To repair underground water pipes.
To build roads.
To decide who might marry legally.

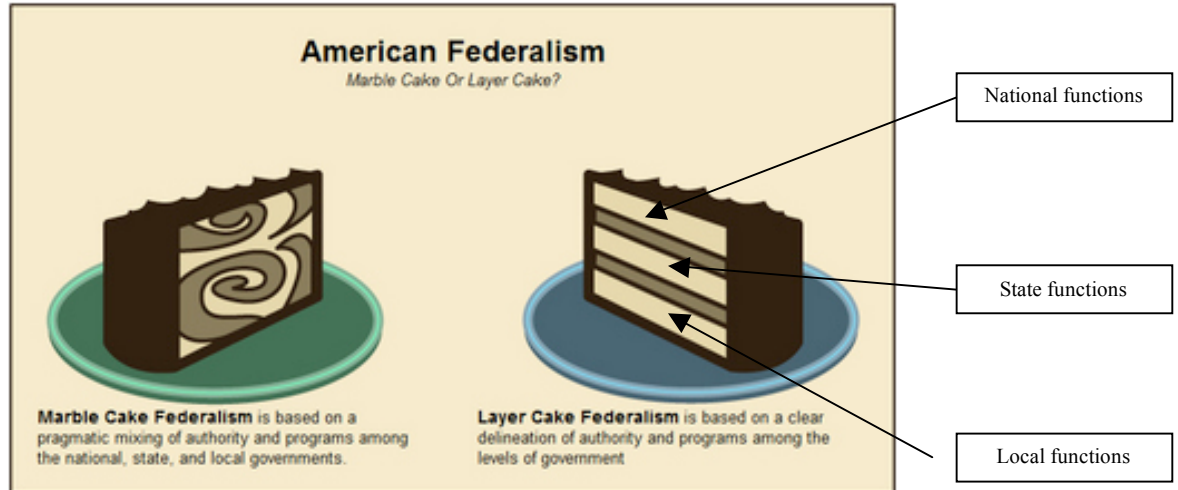
- **Functions of Local Government (examples from the Clarification Document):**
“Sewage, garbage, culture, urban development, and traffic control...”

Other examples

To fill a pothole in the street outside your house.
To dispose of sewage.
To make cities attractive places to live.
To keep traffic moving in an orderly manner.
To pick up garbage.
To put out fires.
To organize community celebrations.
To keep people safe from speeding cars (speed limits).

Resource 4: Transparency

The US Federal System: Layer Cake or Marble Cake?



Source: www.laits.utexas.edu/gov310/CF/amfed/index.html

Slices from the Marble Cake

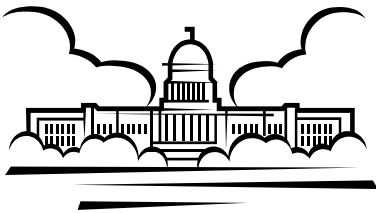
Function	Traditionally a function of...	How the Marble Gets Mixed
Setting education policy	State Government	Today, the federal government threatens to withhold education funds from states that fail to implement No Child Left Behind.
Setting speed limits	State Government	In 1974, the federal government threatened to withhold highway funds from any state that did not lower their speed limit to 55 mph. All 50 states complied (since repealed).
Establishing drinking ages	State Government	In 1984 the federal government threatened to withhold highway construction funds from any state that did not raise their minimum drinking age to 21. All 50 states complied.

Resource 5: Transparency

The Federal Structure of the United States Government

Power is distributed between different levels of government.

National Government



United States

State Government



Delaware

Local Government



City of Wilmington

Resource 6

Analytic Tool: Reasoning Through Federalism

State the Problem or need: _____

Criteria	Which level of government appears particularly suited for addressing the problem based on the criteria?	Explain why.
Resources		
Proximity or Connectedness		
Burden		
Scope		
Tradition, Precedent, Custom		
Authority		

Based on your analysis of the criteria, at which level of government would you begin your search for a solution?

Resource 7: Assessment

Assessment 1

Dwayne, wake up! You need a good grade to pass this class.

I'm so tired. I had to go to work after school last night and my boss made me work from 6:00-11:00.

He can't make you work that many hours. You're only 15!

Scene 1

Scene 2

Scene 3

Which level of government should the students contact to address this problem? Explain why you chose that particular level of government.

A Note About Responses

Both states and the federal government regulate child labor. At times, their regulations conflict – a fact that highlights the messiness of the federal system and the appropriateness of the marble cake analogy. Delaware’s child labor laws state that “Minors 14-15 years of age shall not work more than four (4) hours per day on school days.”

(www.delawareworks.com/industrialaffairs/services/LaborLawEnforcementInfo.shtml#child) Federal child labor laws state that “Permissible work hours for 14- and 15-year-olds are 3 hours on a school day:” (www.dol.gov/dol/topic/youthlabor/workhours.htm). So, students might recommend reporting to either level but should offer reasonable criteria for their choice.