It wasn't long after our country became a new nation that the people created the Constitution as a standard for government. The Constitution of the United States gave the people the power to elect the government to the presidency. Today, it still gives people the power to elect their representatives to national, state, and local governments. In Nevada, we can elect those who we believe will serve best. We can decide how we want to use our resources to meet the needs of our people.

Governing Nevada

Nevada's capitol building, in Carson City, is one of the oldest capitol buildings west of the Mississippi River.
Birth of a Nation

More than 100 years after Columbus discovered the New World, colonists began settling the eastern coast of America. Many came to the new land to escape religious or political persecution. Persecution is when people cause others to suffer because of their beliefs. Colonists came from all over Europe and England. By 1733, England had 13 colonies along the eastern coast of North America. But the people in the colonies were unhappy with the King of England. They thought his laws and rules were unfair. They wanted to form a new and independent nation.
Men from the 13 colonies got together to write a statement to the world. They listed all the unfair things the king had done. They wrote about how the king had taken away some of their rights. They called this document the Declaration of Independence. Here is a list of other things the colonists wrote about:

- All people are equal.
- All people are born with basic rights.
- Governments exist to protect these rights.
- Government power comes from the people.

England and the colonies went to war over these problems. It was called the Revolutionary War. George Washington was the leader of the American soldiers. The fighting lasted almost six years. When the war finally ended, the colonies were free to make their own laws and rules. They formed the government of the United States of America.

People in England are sometimes called British.
**The Colonists**

The colonists became angry when England began taxing their residents. A tax is money collected by the government. It helps pay for things like government workers, the army, and the police. England thought the colonists should help pay for these things and more. In the Declaration of Independence, the colonists said they did not like being taxed without their consent. Here are a few of the taxes the colonists were forced to pay:

- **Sugar Act** taxed sugar and molasses. Colonists used sugar in their tea and molasses for baking.
- **Stamp Act** forced colonists to buy stamps and place one on every piece of paper they read or used. Letters, newspapers, and even playing cards had to have stamps.
- **Townsend Acts** were taxes on glass, tea, paper, and paint. After the colonists rebelled against them, England dropped all of the taxes except the one on tea. To rebel against something means to refuse to do it.
- **Tea Act** taxed British tea. It also said colonists could not buy tea from other countries. The colonists were very unhappy, so they smuggled tea from France and Spain. To smuggle means to bring goods into a place even though it is against the law.

**Government for a New Nation**

After the United States became a new country, Americans had a very big job to do. They needed to create a government. They didn’t want a king or queen. They wanted to be able to choose their own government leaders. Important men from each state met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Sometimes we call these men the nation’s Founding Fathers. They talked about the kind of government the United States should have. They wrote our country’s constitution.

A constitution is a set of rules and ideas for the government. It is the basic law of the land. It tells us how good government should work. Our Founding Fathers wanted to be sure that no one group would have all the power. One of the ways they did this was by dividing the government into different levels and branches.
Levels of Government

There are three different levels of government in the United States. Each level of government has a different job. **Local government** is the government that directs things closest to home. State government is responsible for things all around the state. National government is sometimes called the federal government. It directs things for the whole United States. Take a look at the chart below to see examples of the different jobs for each level.

**National, State, and Local Government Responsibilities**

- National parks and forests
- National defense
- Money and mail
- Relations with other countries
- Car and driver licenses
- State lands and resources
- State roads
- Police and fire protection
- Libraries
- Water and garbage

Branches of Government

The Constitution gives power to three branches of government. Each branch has duties and powers of its own. Each branch also shares powers with the other branches. This way one branch cannot become too powerful or make laws alone. This is called the system of **checks and balances**. Let’s learn a little more about the duties and powers of these branches.
Political Parties

Political parties are groups of people who have a lot of the same ideas about government. Most people in the United States choose either the Democratic party or the Republican party. They are the two main parties in Nevada and in the rest of the United States, but there are other parties too. Political parties want members of their party to get elected to government jobs. The people in each party choose candidates and help them run for office. The parties raise money to pay for TV and radio advertising, make and hand out posters, and help in many other ways. The candidates make speeches to try to win votes. At election time, people vote for the person they think will do the best job.

During elections, look for these two animals on signs and badges:
The elephant is the symbol for the Republicans.
The donkey is the symbol for the Democrats.

Interest Groups

Sometimes people who share common interests get together to try to make changes. Have you ever heard the saying, “There is strength in numbers”? Instead of having just one voice, interest groups combine their single voices into large groups of voices. The more members there are in the group, the more influence, or power, the group has to sway government decision makers.

Many important interest groups have played a part in Nevada history. One group is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or the NAACP. This group works in states all across the country to fight racial discrimination. Black leaders, like Charles Kellar and Dr. James McMillan, served as presidents of our state’s NAACP. Their work helped fight prejudice, segregation, and discrimination in Nevada.

Memory Master

1. What is the Declaration of Independence? Who wrote it?
2. Name the three levels of government.
3. What is a representative democracy?
4. Name something other than making laws that Congress has the power to do.
5. Why is the Bill of Rights an important document for our country?

Nevada, Our Home
Our State Government

Nevada’s government is a lot like our national government. We have our own state constitution that directs our leaders. Our government is also made up of legislative, executive, and judicial branches. These branches help balance power in our state government—just like they do in the federal government.

The Legislative Branch

Nevada’s legislative branch consists of an assembly and senate. Together they are called the legislature. There are 42 members of the assembly and 21 members of the senate. Each member represents a certain area of our state. Just like in national government, the biggest population centers have the most representatives.

Las Vegas and Reno have the most representatives in our legislature because they have the largest populations. Some people in rural Nevada think this system does not fairly represent them. The rural parts of Nevada are those less-populated areas away from cities. Sometimes we call rural areas the country.
Making Laws

Our state legislature meets every two years in Carson City at the state’s capital. The legislative session begins in January. It takes our legislature about 120 days, or four months, to make the laws for our state. Sometimes legislators are unable to finish all their duties in that amount of time. When this happens, a special session is called. Special sessions give legislators time to complete their work.

Legislators in Nevada make many kinds of laws. They make amendments to the state constitution, just like those made to our U.S. Constitution. Legislators also make tax laws that help our government pay for services.

What do you think?

Have you ever thought about how the laws in our state affect you? Did you know that people who operate a business or provide a service in our state need a license? Your teachers have to have a license to teach you. The person who cuts your hair has to have a license. Carpenters, plumbers, and electricians have to be licensed by the state. Your dentist and doctor have to pass a test before they can practice medicine in our state. Why do people need a license to do certain jobs or businesses in Nevada? Does knowing these people are well-trained make it easier to trust them to do a good job for you?
How a Bill Becomes a Law

All Nevada laws begin as bills. You already know that a bill is a written idea for a new law. An idea may come from any resident of our state. But it can only be presented to the legislature by one of its members. To see how it works, let's follow a bill as it becomes a law.

Suppose that you and your classmates want to propose a new law. You would begin by writing a letter to one of your state legislators. If your legislator likes the idea, he or she will put the idea in written form. This is called drafting a bill. Now the bill is ready to be introduced into the senate or assembly. This step is called the first reading. From here, the bill goes to a committee for review. Sometimes the committee just passes the bill along to the next step. But, most of the time, the committee keeps the bill, so they can study it carefully. They hold public meetings, or hearings, to discuss the bill. They talk to other people interested in the bill. Sometimes they make changes to the bill as a result of talking to others.

Then the bill goes back to be read a second time. It can also be amended again if necessary. When this is complete, the president of the group schedules a third reading of the bill. Then it is ready for a vote. If a majority of the voters vote for the bill, it then makes its way to the other legislative group. A bill goes through all the steps in one house of the legislature before moving on to the other. Sometimes it takes a long time for a bill to get through both houses before reaching the governor.
The Executive Branch

The executive branch enforces laws made by our legislature. The governor is the head of this branch. The governor and many other elected leaders, agencies, and state workers are in charge of collecting taxes, suggesting budgets, giving help to schools, and many other things. Just like the president does for federal laws, our governor signs Nevada bills into laws.

Capitol Building

The Nevada state capitol building is over 130 years old. With marble from Alaska and windows made from French crystal, it is a very beautiful building. It is one of the oldest buildings in Nevada. Originally it was built to provide offices for both the governor and the legislature. Before long the growing legislature needed more space, so they moved to a new building. Today our state capitol is still used by the governor and his staff.
The Judicial Branch

This branch of government includes our state courts and judges. Nevada courts settle arguments about what laws mean. There are many different types of courts in our state. The highest is the Nevada Supreme Court. Seven justices serve in this branch of government. They also manage all other courts in our state judicial system.

District or trial courts are the next type of courts in Nevada’s judicial system. Today there are nine district courts and over 60 district judges. This court deals with things like juvenile and abuse problems, and family law.

Justice courts handle small crimes and cases under $10,000. We call these judges, justices of the peace. At last count there were 48 justice courts in Nevada and 63 justices of the peace.

Municipal courts are the courts in our cities and towns. These are the courts most people visit when they get a traffic or speeding ticket. They handle cases that happen within the city limits. Today, there are 17 municipal courts and 27 municipal judges.
County and City Governments

There are many regions with different needs in our state. Each region has local governments that provide services to all the people. County and city governments also help spread government power all around the state. That way, no one group can become too powerful.

Our state is divided into 17 small regions called counties. Counties have government leaders and laws called *ordinances.* Each county has its own government building in a city known as the county seat. Can you find your county and county seat on the map?

County governments are in charge of keeping all kinds of records. They keep land records and local tax records. They keep birth records and death records. They make laws for the county and hire sheriffs to enforce them. County laws deal with things like pollution and parks. They also decide where houses, stores, and other businesses should be built.

City Governments

City governments are another important part of Nevada local governments. They help protect the people. They hire the police departments, fire departments, and people to keep the streets clean and safe. City governments also provide things like clean drinking water and garbage collection. They give licenses to local businesses. You even buy a license for your pet from your city government.

The city council and the mayor are elected by the people. Their job is to make laws that keep things running smoothly.

What do you think?

Do you know who your local government leaders are? Are there problems in your town that you would like the city council to discuss? How can you become involved in your community?
What's in a Name?

Many of Nevada's counties have very unusual names. Some were even named after famous people. Did you know that Lincoln County got its name from one of our most famous presidents? Abraham Lincoln was the president when Nevada became a state.

Clark County was named after a senator from Montana, William Clark, who built the railroad through southern Nevada. Douglas County was named after a U.S. senator from Illinois by the name of Stephen A. Douglas.

We even have counties that were named after some of the natural features in Nevada. White Pine County got its name from the many trees growing in the area. Esmeralda comes from the Spanish word for emerald. The word Elko comes from an Indian word that means beautiful. Mineral County got its name from the many minerals found there. The name of Eureka comes from a Greek word that means "I have found it." Some people say this is what Nevada miners said when they discovered silver and gold.

Many Nevada counties were named after important military heroes. Storey County was named after a soldier who died in the Pyramid Lake Indian War. The counties of Pershing, Lyon, Lander, and Churchill were all named for U.S. Army generals.

Other Local Governments

Nevada has one more type of local government. It is even smaller than county or city government. These special kinds of governments make rules and provide services for the citizens in their community. These community groups include school boards, health districts, library boards, and water districts. Sometimes people are elected to serve on these boards. Other times they are chosen by city or county councils.

As citizens, it's important for us to let government leaders know how we feel about current issues. When you are old enough, voting is one of the best ways you can do this. Voting gives you a voice and allows you to participate in government.

Governing Nevada
Government Services

We have learned a lot about how our federal, state, and local governments work. Each level of government has special jobs and des necessary services for the people. Our state and local governments offer many public services for Nevadans. There are services for the young and for senior citizens. We have a national guard set up to protect our state highway department builds and cares for the roads. Other treatments, or state agencies, work to make our lives better too. They to improve things like education, health care, and our environment.

Pay for Services

x money helps pay for most of the services people use. In Nevada, there are many different kinds of taxes. They help pay for schools and roads. They pay for programs to protect our land and water. They pay for all kinds of public services like job training, fire protection, library services. How many public services can you find in this town?
Lesson 2

1. What are the two groups that make up our state legislative branch?
2. What is a hearing?
3. Who is the head of Nevada's executive branch of government?
4. Which court includes judges we called justices of the peace?
5. Name two services that taxes pay for.
Consider Character

It takes courage to speak out for what you believe in, run for office, and give speeches to large audiences. Over the decades, many people have shown courage in trying to shape Nevada into a successful state. Many Nevada leaders want a strong Nevada today and for the future. Go through this whole book and find an example of a leader who showed courage. Find an important decision this person made that showed courage as a leader. Would our government be different today without this leader?

Technology Tie-In

Have you ever thought about how technology changes law? Does new technology mean new laws? Sometimes the government has to make laws on how to use new technology. Think about some of the legal issues that come from new technology like computers, cell phones, and the Internet. Discuss them with your class. Can you think of others?

Should you be allowed to talk on your cell phone while driving a car?

Are there any places that cell phones should be turned off?

Is Internet information free? Should you be able to copy any words or pictures from websites?

What should happen to people who send e-mails that can mess up your computer?

Should you pay sales tax on things you order from the Internet?

Does everyone have free speech when they write things for the Internet?

Nevada, Our Home
Go back to the drawing on the page before to answer these questions about the town:

- How many public services can you find in this town?
- How does the government pay for these services?
- Who makes decisions about these local services?
- Cover up one service. What would happen to the town without it?
- Do you have any of these services near you?

**Activity**

**Your Fair Share of Taxes**

Kids, it's time to pay your taxes again! Did you know that every time you buy something you are giving money to the government? You are a citizen paying sales tax. Taxes help keep our state running.

Do you know how much sales tax people pay in Nevada? Look at the map on the right to see how much tax people pay in each county. Then choose three counties with different tax rates and figure out how much sales tax you would have to pay if you bought something that cost $1, $10, or $200.

Governing Nevada
Making a Living in Nevada

10,000 new jobs in Nevada remain a here dreams can be.
We are creating new jobs at a faster than any other state in nation. And these are jobs, quality jobs, jobs with livable wages and opportunity for our working. Given this news, should surprise that so many want to come here by the wonderful opportunities and lifestyle Nevada has to offer.”
Governor Kenny Guinn, 2005 State of the State Address