

# Lesson Plan:

## Commander In Chief

Class: U.S. Government

Unit: Executive Branch

### Unit Essential Question:

What is the role of the Executive Branch in the Government of the United States of America?

### Guiding Question(s):

- What duties/powers are tied to the President's role as Commander in Chief?
- What is the difference between a “war” and a “conflict”?

### Objective(s):

- Students will be able to describe the responsibilities tied to the President’s role as Commander in Chief.
- Students will be able to differentiate between a war and conflict.

### Teacher Background information:

The President of the United States serves as the Commander in Chief for the armed forces. Essentially, the President outranks all other leaders of the military and their orders cannot be overruled. The War Powers Resolution limits the President’s ability to wage war without authorization from Congress. Without an Authorization of Use of Force, the President must not allow the military of the United States to be involved in combat for more than 60 days. The President is also required to notify Congress of any use of the military outside of a declaration of war or Authorization of Use of Force.

### Materials needed:

- [Google Slides presentation](#)
- [Short Answer worksheets](#) (one per student)
- Projector
- Device capable of casting slideshow to projector
- Timer

**“Do Now”/ Hook/ Opening activity:**

- Begin class by asking students if they know anyone who has served in the military, ask students to share some details if they are willing to (5 minutes)
- Draw students in with a catchy statement “I know that each of these people has served in the military and I know that they had a rank. I can’t guess at what rank they had, but I do know which rank they didn’t have: Five Star General.”
  - Explain to students that you know this because there have only been nine people to hold such a high rank. Go on to explain that one of them, Douglas MacArthur, was born in Little Rock.
  - Explain how MacArthur was the most powerful General in Korea and was relieved after disagreeing with Truman.
  - Ask students “Why was President Truman able to fire MacArthur even if MacArthur was a five Star General?”
  - Explain (if students don’t guess) that President Truman, as the Commander in Chief, was ultimately in charge of the entire military, including MacArthur.
- Transition into the lesson by introducing the lesson’s focus and posing the guiding question “What duties/powers are tied to the President’s role as Commander in Chief?”
- Briefly discuss the following elements of the President’s Role as Commander in Chief.
  - Defense of the United States
    - Commanding the military in the event of a direct attack on the United States
  - Ultimate authority over all branches of the military
    - Orders movement and actions of all branches of the military. Also governs policy within the military. For example, Truman ordered desegregation of the military in 1947.
  - Way in which ultimate authority clears up the chain of command in a moment of crisis.
    - Unlike the need for consensus in Congress, the President can act on their own to respond to a crisis quickly.

**Activities:**

- 1) “In order to explore the president’s role as Commander in Chief of the military, we will consider a real life example from 1996, when President Clinton ordered cruise missile strikes on Iraq.” Introduce the map of Iraq in the slideshow and point out for students where Iraq is and note the Kuwaiti border, Baghdad, and Erbil’s locations.
- 2) “We will be watching a short video clip, while you watch, consider the questions on your worksheet as we will be answering them afterward.”
- 3) Play students the [video clip](#) (stop at 4:21 when press Q&A begins).
- 4) Direct students to complete the short answer questions on their worksheet and to provide quotations from the speech’s transcript (display on the projector [linked here](#)) that support their answers. (5 minutes)
- 5) Discuss answers to the questions as a class for several minutes.

- 6) “Now we will consider another example of a Presidential Address, in this case, the one made by Franklin Roosevelt following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.”
- 7) Play [FDR’s address](#) following the attack on Pearl Harbor. (8 minutes)
- 8) Ask students to compare President Clinton’s Iraq Address with FDR’s address to Congress following the attack on Pearl Harbor.
  - a) Direct special attention to the audience for the two speeches
  - b) Direct special attention to the purpose of the two speeches
    - i) President Clinton has informed the American people that action has taken place.
    - ii) President Roosevelt is requesting a declaration of war.  
(5 Minutes)
- 9) Briefly discuss the difference between a war and conflict and the basics of the War Powers Resolution. (5 minutes)

**Closing:**

Ask the class what the President’s role as Commander in Chief does and does not allow them to do. Write the answers on the board for all students to view.

Look forward to the next lesson in which students will consider the President’s role as Chief Diplomat.

**Assessment:**

Use the short answer response worksheet the students completed during the video and score for participation.

**Modifications:**

- Ensure subtitles are enabled during video playback.
- Use easy to read and enlarged fonts on the worksheet.

**Resources:**

[President Clinton’s Remarks on 1996 Iraq Missile Strikes](#)

[Transcript of President Clinton’s remarks](#)

[President Roosevelt’s remarks to Congress following Pearl Harbor Attack](#)

[War Powers: Library of Congress \(Overview Section\)](#)

[Powers of the Presidency Portal from the Clinton Presidential Library](#)

[War Powers Resolution of 1973](#)