Tennessee Secretary of State

Blue Book Lesson Plans

The Departments in Tennessee's Executive Branch

Author: Lain Whitaker, St. Mary's Episcopal School

Grade Level: High School, U.S. Government and Civics

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For additional lesson plans, click here.

There are a limited number of hard copies of Blue Books available. To see about ordering a set for your classroom, please contact the Secretary of State's office at (615) 741-2819 or one of your local legislators. The online version of the Blue Book is also available here.

Introduction:

The departments of the executive branch help the governor of Tennessee implement the laws passed by the General Assembly. In this lesson, students examine the mission, history, and basic services provided by the departments in the executive branch of Tennessee government. They will draw conclusions about which services are most important to the citizens of Tennessee.

Guiding Questions:

- What are the departments in the executive branch of the state of Tennessee and what do they do?
- Why are the departments in the executive branch important to the people of the state? How do they help citizens?
- What conclusions can one draw about Tennessee's history and priorities from the dates that the departments developed?

Learning Objectives: In the course of the lesson, students will…

- Analyze one department in the executive branch of Tennessee government.
- Summarize main points about the department in a written format to share with other students.
- Draw conclusions about why certain executive departments were created.
- Become familiar with the departments in Tennessee's executive branch.
- Create an argument for the continuance of a particular department.

Curriculum Standards:

GC.57 - Summarize the functions of departments or agencies of the executive branch in the state of Tennessee. (P, TN)

Materials Needed:

1) *Tennessee Blue Book* (PDFs provided)
    - pgs. 174 - 175, graphic organizer of executive branch and introduction
    - pgs. 211 - 380, information about executive departments
2) Copies of "Additional Information about the Executive Departments"
3) Copies of the note taking outline or worksheet (both attached)
4) Copies of the template for the department poster (attached) OR internet access to the Printing Press Interactive
5) Optional: the Persuasion Map Interactive
6) Optional: rubrics for assessment (attached)

Background:

"The governor and his executive branch agencies "execute" or administer laws, mandates, and new programs created by the General Assembly by statute. The executive branch delivers a wide range of services to citizens and it employs more than 44,500 people in twenty-two Cabinet-level departments and other agencies." (pg. 175, *Tennessee Blue Book*)

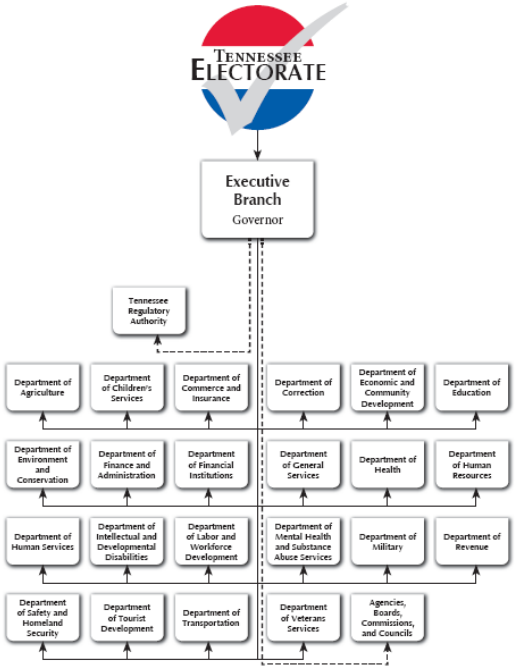
- *Tennessee Blue Book* (pgs. 174-175, 211-380)
- "Tennessee Governor's Office" – Tennessee Encyclopedia
- See attached handout with dates departments were created, page numbers in the *Tennessee Blue Book*, and websites.

Lesson Activities:

Activity 1: The 22 Departments in the Executive Branch

Note to teacher: Depending on the size of the class, teachers may choose to place students in pairs or small groups for the study of a particular department. Teachers can also choose to assign fewer than all 22 departments. It would be a good idea for the teacher to read over the pages in the *Tennessee Blue Book* about the departments before deciding which ones to assign. Some departments are larger than others and have more responsibilities and history for students to explore.

1) Each student (working individually, with a partner, or in a small group) is assigned to study a particular department in the executive branch. Beginning with time in class, students should skim the pages in the *Tennessee Blue Book* for the assigned department and either make notes that respond to the points given in the note-taking outline (attached) OR fill out the worksheet (attached). Students may work with partners/group members to divide topics on the outline/worksheet to research. Whatever is not completed in class may be finished for homework using the online version of the *Tennessee Blue Book*. For the note-taking outline, emphasis should be on producing concise notes that address the required topics.



Tennessee Blue Book, pg. 174

   Note: The commissioner of the department may have changed since the *Tennessee Blue Book* was published. Students can look up the current commissioner on the department's website (listed in the *Tennessee Blue Book* or in the "Additional Info" handout).

2) At the end of the note-taking/worksheet activity, students are asked to list problems that the department could solve. Have students write each problem on a notecard/sticky note. Collect the notecards/sticky notes to use later in Activity 3.
3) After the students collect the information, students should create an 8½" x 11" poster for their department using the Printing Press site (if online resources are available) or following the format of the template provided. Students should aim to write clear, concise summaries of the information asked for in the template.

Students may search for downloadable pictures from Google Images if using the online interactive.

4) Have students arrange the completed posters on the wall in chronological order based on the date that the department was created (see attached handout for chronological order).

Activity 2: Executive Departments and Tennessee History

1) Divide students into small groups of 3 to 5.
2) Allow the groups time (perhaps 3 minutes) to examine each of the posters. Each group should draw conclusions about why the departments were created at their respective time. What does the creation of each department show about the concerns of the General Assembly and of the governor at that particular point in Tennessee's history?

   Note: If the answer is not clear, students may want to look up information about Tennessee history in the *Tennessee Blue Book*, Tennessee Encyclopedia, etc.
3) Each group should compose a list of 2 or 3 conclusions (no more than 100 words) about why a department was created at that point in history. Groups should share their conclusions with the class.

Activity 3: Solve My Problem

1) Take the notecards/sticky notes that the students wrote in Activity 1, and distribute them randomly among the groups.
2) Students should examine the posters for the executive departments and attach the notecard/sticky note under the poster for the department they think could solve the problem. Have students share their reasoning with the class or in writing.

Activity 4: Who Am I?

In order to become better acquainted with the departments, students could engage in a guessing game. Place the names of the 22 (or whatever number the teacher chooses to use) executive departments on small notecards. Each student should have a card taped/pinned to his/her back. Teacher sets a timer for 5 minutes. Students may then mill about the room, showing their "identity" to other students and asking them yes or no questions about what it is. The student who is first to discover his/her identity is the winner. All students who finish in less than 5 minutes (or whatever time limit the teacher gives) could earn a small reward.

Assessment Activity: Voted Off the Island!

1) Teacher should divide the number of executive departments studied in half. Groups that studied departments within each half will be in competition with each other.
2) The students who created each poster will now have to construct an argument that defends the existence of their department and explain its importance to the people of Tennessee. They may use the Persuasion Map to organize their ideas. Teachers may want to take some time to brainstorm with the class about what would qualify as good evidence that the department is necessary to the people of Tennessee. Students can collect information from the *Tennessee Blue Book* and the department's official websites.

William R. Snodgrass Tower

3) Once the students develop their arguments, a "town hall" meeting will take place where one half of the class will present arguments for their departments to the other half of the class. Each student/pair/group (depending on the original poster assignment) will present for 30 to 45 seconds to make the case that their department is invaluable to Tennessee and should be continued as is.
4) After the departments' arguments have been presented, each department's defenders will have an additional 30 seconds to respond to what has been presented by other departments.
5) At the conclusion of the arguments, the half of the class serving as the audience will vote to eliminate one of the departments with the understanding that some of the duties/responsibilities of that department could transfer to another department.
6) The activity will then be repeated with the other half of the class.
7) **Assessment piece**: Students can submit a written copy of the argument they present in defense of their department. It may be in paragraph or outline form. The teacher may use the writing activity as well as the oral presentation to assess the student's understanding. Attached is a potential rubric to use for the poster and the defense of the department.

Additional Assessment or Enrichment Options:

1) Students could compare their department to a department in the federal executive branch. They can draw conclusions about how they differ and what those differences reflect about the roles of state and national governments.
2) Students could create a mascot, slogan, or emoji for their department, giving an explanation/justification for their choices.
3) Have students write an essay answering the following question: If you could create an executive department, what would it be and what would it do?

Option for extension: Invite state legislators or local elected officials to come speak to the classroom about their role in government.

The Departments in the Tennessee Executive Branch: Additional Information

Name of Department	Year created	Page # in Blue Book (15-16)	Website
Agriculture	1854	211	tn.gov/agriculture
Commerce and Insurance	1878	227	tn.gov/commerce
Financial Institutions	1913	297	tn.gov/tdfi
Education	1923	251	tn.gov/education
Health	1923	305	tn.gov/health
Revenue	1923	351	tn.gov/revenue
Human Resources	1939*/**	313	tn.gov/dohr
Safety and Homeland Security	1939	357	tn.gov/safety
Veterans Services	1945	377	tn.gov/veteran
Correction	1955	235	tn.gov/correction
Finance and Administration	1959	291	tn.gov/finance
Military	1970**	341	tnmilitary.org
Economic and Community Development	1972	243	tn.gov/ecd
General Services	1972	301	tn.gov/generalservices
Transportation	1972*	371	tn.gov/tdot
Tourist Development	1976*	363	tn.gov/tourism
Human Services	1977*	319	tn.gov/humanserv
Environment and Conservation	1991*	283	tn.gov/environment
Children's Services	1996*	221	tn.gov/youth
Labor and Workforce Development	1999	329	tn.gov/workforce
Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	2011*	325	tn.gov/didd
Mental Health and Substance Abuse	2012*	337	tn.gov/mental

* Indicates that the work of the department began at an earlier date under a different department or under a different name. Additional research about the actual beginning of the department may need to be done.
** Indicates the date for that department's creation is not in the *Tennessee Blue Book*. Found in the Tennessee Code. Note that the military has existed since the founding of the State (see Tennessee State Constitution) but the administrative department itself was not officially created until 1970.

Note Taking Outline for the Executive Departments

Students should create an outline of notes which provides answers/conclusions to the questions in each section.

- Purpose
  - What does this department do?
  - What is its mission?
  - How does it help the governor carry out his duties to the citizens?
- Organization
  - Who is the current commissioner (head) of this department?*
  - How many people does it employ?
  - Are there other boards & agencies that are part of this department? If so, name the 3 that seem most important.
- History
  - When was it created?
  - Why was it created?
- Evaluations/Opinions about this department
  - How is it beneficial/important to the people of Tennessee?
  - What is the oddest fact you discovered about this department?
  - What is the most surprising fact you discovered about this department?
  - What adjective would you use to describe this department?
  - Is this department necessary?
  - Think of 3 problems this department could solve for businesses or private citizens. (write each of these on a notecard/sticky note to be used later).

* Commissioners may have changed since the publication of the *Blue Book*. Check the department's website to be sure.

Data Collecting Worksheet for an Executive Department in Tennessee

Name(s) of student(s) _____

Name of Department _____

Purpose:

1. What does this department do? (50 words or less) _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
2. What is its mission? (50 words or less) _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
3. How does it help the governor carry out his duties to the citizens? (one clearly written sentence)
   _____
   _____

Organization of the Department:

1. Who is the current commissioner (head) of this department, and what is interesting about him/her?_____
   _____
   _____
2. How many people does it employ? _____
3. Are there other boards & agencies that are part of this department? If so, name the 3 that seem most important. _____
   _____
   _____

History of the Department:

1. When was it created? _____
2. Why was it created? (50 to 100 words) _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

Evaluations/Opinions about this Department:

(Answer each question with one sentence. Back up your opinion with information about the department from the *Blue Book* and your own reasoning.)

1. How is it beneficial/important to the people of Tennessee?
   _____
   _____
2. What is the oddest fact you discovered about this department?
   _____
   _____
3. What is the most surprising fact you discovered about this department?
   _____
   _____

4. What adjective would you use to describe this department?

_____

_____

5. Is this department necessary?

_____

_____

6. Think of 3 problems this department could solve for businesses or private citizens.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Name of Department

In a paragraph of no more than 150 words, explain what this depatment does. What is its mission ?

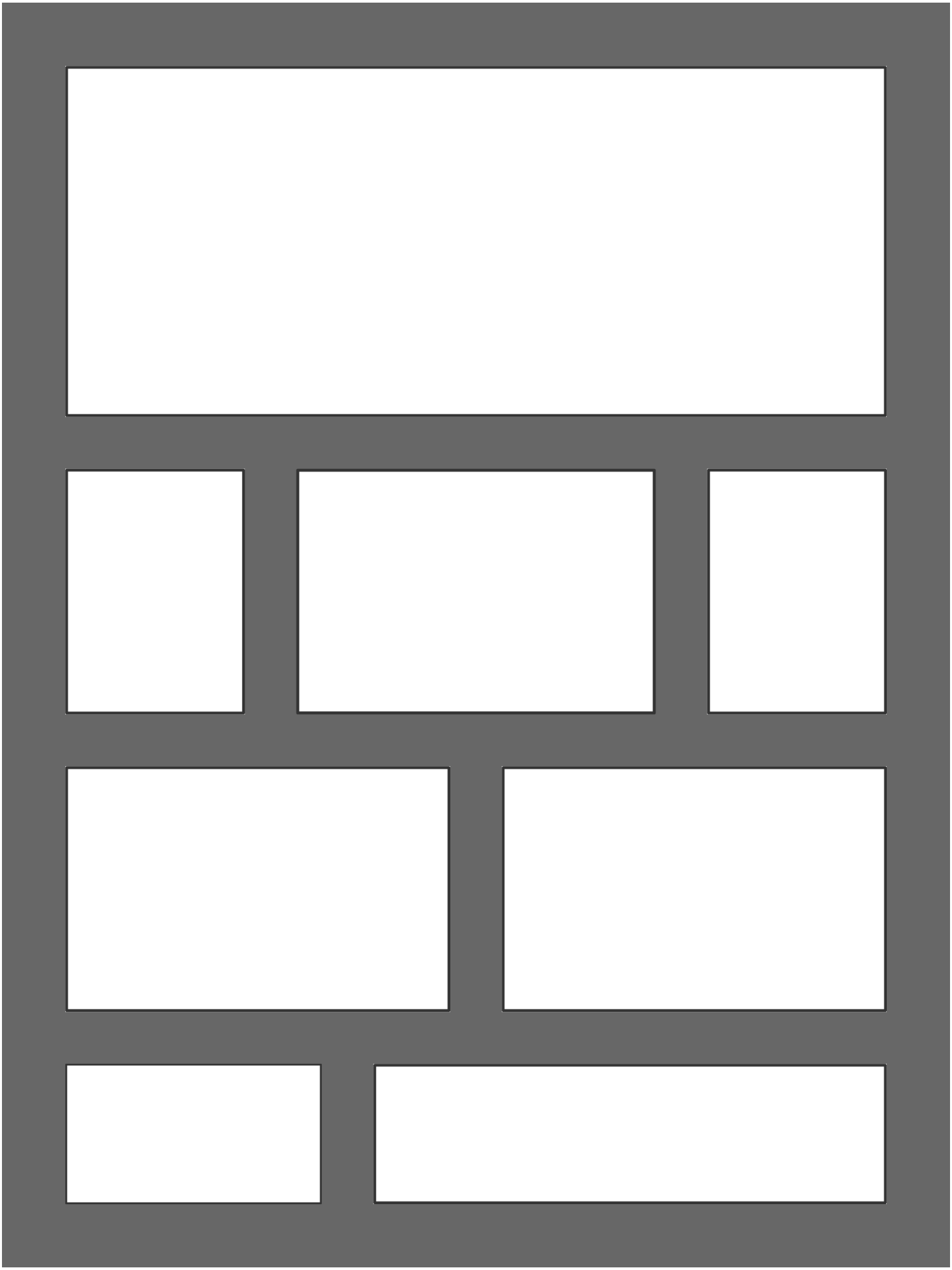
Give a bulleted list of 3 to 5 important things this department does for businesses, organizations, or citizens in Tennessee.
(In the space to the left, put a picture that communicates something about the identity or purpose of the department.)

In a paragraph of no more than 150 words, summarize the history of this department.

Use this space to summarize some of the conclusions reached about the department. Summaries may be provided in a bulleted list.

* What adjective could/should be used to describe this department?
* What is the oddest fact about this department?
* What is the most surprising thing about this department?
* What is the most disturbing fact about this department?

In this space, explain who the commissioner (head/boss) of the department is. (Provide a picture in the space to the left) Give one or two important facts about him/her. Explain how many employees the department has and list one to three important agencies (if there are any) that are part of this department.



The Departments in Tennessee's Executive Branch: Rubrics

Name(s) _____

Rubric for Poster on Executive Branch

Department assigned: _____

____ (15) explanation of department & its mission (correct format? correct length? pertinent information? coherent?)

____ (15) list of important things department does (correct format? pertinent information?)

____ (15) summary of the history of the department (correct format? correct length? pertinent information? coherent?)

____ (15) conclusions about department (correct format? pertinent information?)

____ (15) information about commissioner of department (correct format? correct length? pertinent information? coherent?)

____ (15) pictures (informative? accurate? easy to see?)

____ (10) overall neatness and evidence of effort (items in correct place? clear & readable?)

____ (100) TOTAL points awarded

Rubric for Argument Defending Department

____ (20) Outline of argument

- There is a clearly stated claim made for keeping the department. (4)
- There are two or three reasons given for retaining the department. (6)
- There are at least two pieces of evidence provided for each reason. (6)
- There is a closing statement that makes a final plea for retention of the department. (4)

____ (15) Oral Presentation of argument

- Student presents argument clearly, following the format of the persuasive map and remembering to ask audience to vote to retain department at end of speech.
- Student maintains good eye contact, speaks loudly & clearly.
- In final 30 second speech, student responds to specific points made by other students and clearly defends reasons department should be retained, remembering to ask audience to vote to retain department at end of speech.

____ (5) Overall civility: Student addresses others with respect, keeps discussion focused on reasoning and facts – not personal comments or attacks.

____ (40) TOTAL points awarded.