

## Lesson Overview

# POETIC CIVICS



## Completing the story of *Yertle the Turtle* by Dr. Seuss

**Overview:** This lesson will have students creatively exploring concepts related to the purpose of government and restrictions on power through the children's book *Yertle the Turtle* by Dr. Seuss.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to...

- Identify and discuss the concepts of human/natural rights, rule of law, and freedom found in Dr. Seuss' *Yertle the Turtle*
- Create a system of government reflecting the concepts of human rights, rule of law, and freedom.

**Time Required:**

- One 50 minute class period

**Materials Needed:**

- Copy of *Yertle the Turtle* by Dr. Seuss
- [Video of Yertle the Turtle](#) (available on YouTube)
- Handout A: *Yertle the Turtle* Questions for Discussion
- Handout B: *You're the Poet*

### Procedures

1. Begin the lesson by reading Dr. Seuss' book *Yertle the Turtle* to the class. If you do not have the book, the story is available on YouTube to view. [Click here for video of Yertle the Turtle](#). Tell students to think about the different concepts addressed in the story as it is read. These concepts may relate to types of government, human/natural rights, the role of a leader, the rule of law, and freedom. Instruct students to create a list of concepts addressed in the story as it is read. Discuss the concepts the students have identified.
2. Distribute Handout A. Instruct students to complete the questions either individually or in pairs. Discuss with students (*guide provided*).
3. The story ends with the turtles gaining their freedom – but what is next for the turtles of the pond? Distribute Handout B: *You Be the Poet*. The students will now be completing the story of *Yertle the Turtle* to show what happened at the pond after the fall of the king. Students will need to work in pairs or small groups to organize the turtle government in a way that reflects the concepts of human/natural rights, the rule of law, and freedom.
  - a. **As a more in depth lesson**, students can complete the poem in a way that reflects the ideals in the U.S. Constitution. In addition to addressing human/natural rights, rule of law, and freedom, students should incorporate checks and balances, separation of power, elections, and individual rights.

### Next Generation Sunshine State Standards

SS.7.C.1.7 Describe how the Constitution limits the powers of government through separation of powers and checks and balances.

SS.7.C.1.9 Define the rule of law and recognize its influence on the development of the American legal, political, and governmental systems.

SS.7.C.3.1 Compare different forms of government (direct democracy, representative democracy, socialism, communism, monarchy, oligarchy, autocracy).

SS.7.C.3.6 Evaluate constitutional rights and their impact on individuals and society.

## Assessment

- **Worksheet** – Students will be assessed for completion of Handout A.
- **Writing assignment** – Students will be assessed for the completion of the assignment, ability to follow directions, accuracy of information, and creativity.
- **Observation** – Students will be assessed for participation and cooperation in class and small group assignments.

### Suggested Scoring Rubric for

Assignment	Scoring	Total
Handout A: Yertle the Turtle Discussion Questions	5 points for completion and note taking during class discussion	5 points
Handout B: You're the Poet	10 points for completion 10 points for addressing concepts in the directions 10 points for correctly addressing the concepts 10 points for creativity	40 points
You're the Poet Group Work	5 points for cooperation and participation	5 points

# YERTLE THE TURTLE

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Yertle is “king of the pond”. What kind of government does this represent?

How could you characterize Yertle as a dictator?

2. Mack says:

I know, up on top you are seeing great sights,  
But down here at the bottom we, too, should have rights.  
We turtles can't stand it. Our shells will all crack!  
Besides, we need food. We are starving!" groaned Mack.

What concept is Mack addressing?

What kind of rights should the other turtles have, in your opinion?

3. King Yertle responds:

"You hush up your mouth!" howled the mighty King Yertle.  
"You've no right to talk to the world's highest turtle.  
I rule from the clouds! Over land! Over sea!  
There's nothing, no, NOTHING, that's higher than me!"

In our system of government, how are leaders kept from getting too powerful?

What concept reinforces the idea that no one is above the law, including the president, police officers, wealthy people, and celebrities? Do you think there is anyone who is above the law?

What could the moon represent in the story based on the idea of the rule of law?



# YERTLE THE TURTLE

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Yertle is “king of the pond”. What kind of government does this represent? (*Monarchy, dictatorship*)

How could you characterize Yertle as a dictator?

*A dictator is a person who rules a country with total authority and often in a cruel or brutal way. King Yertle shows total authority without respect for the rights of those he rules.*

2. Mack says:

I know, up on top you are seeing great sights,  
But down here at the bottom we, too, should have rights.  
We turtles can't stand it. Our shells will all crack!  
Besides, we need food. We are starving!" groaned Mack.

What concept is Mack addressing?

*(Human rights, natural rights)*

Why do you think these rights are important?

3. King Yertle responds:

"You hush up your mouth!" howled the mighty King Yertle.

"You've no right to talk to the world's highest turtle.

I rule from the clouds! Over land! Over sea!

There's nothing, no, NOTHING, that's higher than me!"

In our system of government, how are leaders kept from getting too powerful?

*(U.S. Constitution, checks and balances, laws)*

What concept reinforces the idea that no one is above the law, including the president, police officers, wealthy people, and celebrities?

*(Rule of Law)*

What could the moon represent in the story based on the idea of the rule of law?

*(The law)*