



SPHERE

Teaching Civic
Culture Together

Teacher Lesson Guide: Who Holds the Purse Strings?

The Power of the People to Determine Economic Freedom

This lesson examines how colonists resisted taxation without representation and how the Framers intentionally placed the “power of the purse” in the hands of the leaders who are the most accountable to the people. Students will explore how economic freedom, representation, and consent shaped independence and continue to influence modern governance.

Key Learning Objectives:

- Connect rule of law to economic freedom and representative government.
- Identify civic and economic consequences when governments control resources without consent.
- Explain why the Framers required all tax/revenue bills to originate in the House of Representatives.

Essential Questions for Student Reflection:

- Why is economic freedom, like the power to tax, essential to political liberty?
- How does the “power of the purse” give people influence over government decisions?
- How can modern citizens ensure accountability in government spending?

Suggested Flow of Activities:

- 10–15 minutes: Introduction and Primary Sources
 - Open with Who Controls the Purse? Coin and Purse Activity.
 - Read/discuss selected quotes from the US Constitution, Article I, Section 7; *The Federalist* no. 58; and Elbridge Gerry at the constitutional convention.

- Guide students to define the “power of the purse” and to explain why Founders prioritized it.
- 25–35 minutes: Counting the Cost of Liberty Activity.
 - Explore taxation and spending that affect families' survival and economic freedom.
 - Discuss the emotional stress of arbitrary taxation versus representative consent.
 - Optional: Modern Budget (Expansion Activity)
- 10–15 minutes: Closing Reflection – Quick Questions
 - Prompt: “Imagine you couldn't vote for anyone in charge of determining how much you are taxed or deciding how to spend tax money. What is a problem that could happen? How does voting protect your economic freedom?”

Optional Extensions (Day 2 or for advanced learners)

- Writing Activity: The Power of the Purse. Explore *The Federalist* no. 51
- Teacher Tips:
 - Share historical context: Stamp Act (paper goods), Townshend Acts (imports), mercantilist trade policies, Navigation Acts—all burdened different colonies uniquely.
 - Make modern connections: Today's voters also influence fiscal policy; states are affected uniquely by tax/spending decisions.
 - Encourage critical thinking about accountability: how representation protects liberty and livelihoods.