

Name _____

Date _____

Three Branches

The United States federal government consists of three branches: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch. Each branch has its own set of powers and responsibilities to ensure the success of the country's democracy. Each of these branches is also responsible for checking the decisions and practices of the other branches. This system is called "checks and balances." It exists to ensure that no individual branch becomes too dominant.

The legislative branch is also called Congress. Congress is made up of two separate groups of elected officials from each of the 50 states: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Both groups work together to make laws.

In order for Congress to make a law, a bill must be passed by Congress and then approved by the executive branch. This is one way the president, a member of the executive branch, can "check" Congress' power.

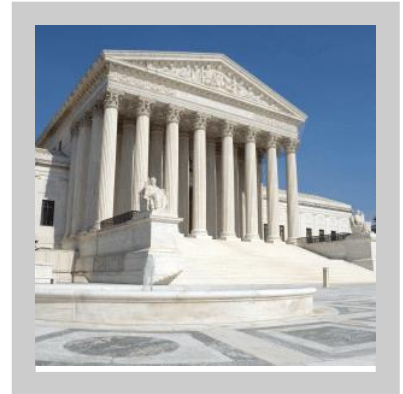
The executive branch is made up of the president, vice president, and the presidential cabinet. The president has the power to veto any laws that Congress may propose. However, if Congress strongly desires a particular bill to be passed, they have the power to override the president's rejection. This requires a majority vote, and in this case two thirds of the members must agree. Here, "balance" is maintained in the law-making process.

The judicial branch is made up of federal judges. It is responsible for ensuring that the laws of the United States are constitutional. If a law is in question, it will go through a process called judicial review. During this review, the judges will analyze the law and determine if it is consistent with the country's constitution. If a law is determined to be unconstitutional, it will be thrown out. Congress then has the task of making a new law. As the judicial branch checks the laws, it too is helping maintain the balance of power between branches.

With the process of checks and balances between the three branches of federal government, a clear and precise method exists for the formation of United States laws. Though this system was created over 200 years ago, it is still successful in facilitating a democratic society today.

1) According to the passage, what does the legislative branch do?

- A. make laws
- B. determine if laws are unconstitutional
- C. reject laws
- D. hold court when laws are broken



- 2) Which of the following statements accurately exemplifies the United States federal government's system of "checks and balances" as it is described in the passage?
- A. The president can veto a bill passed by Congress.
 - B. Congress is made up of two separate groups of elected officials from each of the 50 states.
 - C. Bills must pass through both the Senate and the House of Representatives before they are submitted to the president.
 - D. Decisions by federal judges can be appealed, and cases can be tried again in a higher court.
- 3) Based on its use in paragraph 3, it can be understood that the word **veto** belongs to which of the following word groups?
- A. resume, continue, proceed
 - B. edit, revise, modify
 - C. reject, disallow, stop
 - D. accept, grant, uphold
- 4) According to the passage, which branch of government is responsible for ensuring that the laws of the United States are constitutional?
- A. the legislative branch
 - B. the executive branch
 - C. the judicial branch
 - D. all of the above
- 5) This overall message put forth in this passage is best described as
- A. persuasive
 - B. informative
 - C. scientific
 - D. fictional
- 6) Which of the following statements from the passage expresses an *opinion* as opposed to a *fact*?
- A. "In order for Congress to make a law, a bill must be passed and then approved by the executive branch."
 - B. "Though this system was created over 200 years ago, it is still successful in facilitating a democratic society today."
 - C. "If a law is determined to be unconstitutional, it will be thrown out."
 - D. "The United States federal government consists of three branches."

7) Using the information from the passage, explain the system of checks and balances in your own words.

Answers and Explanations

1) A

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

To answer this detail question correctly, we need to find where the author discusses the legislative branch in the passage. A good way to do this is to scan the topic sentence of each paragraph, since this sentence will likely tell us what information can be found in the rest of that paragraph. The topic sentence of paragraph 2 reads, "The legislative branch is also called Congress." This lets us know that the details we are looking for can likely be found in paragraph 2.

In paragraph 2, the author writes, "The legislative branch works together to make laws." Using this information, we can tell that the legislative branch makes laws. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

In paragraph 4, the author discusses how the judicial branch reviews laws writing, "If a law is determined to be unconstitutional, it will be thrown out." Since this is the role of the judicial branch, and not the legislative branch, we can tell that the legislative branch does not determine if laws are unconstitutional. This means **(B)** is incorrect.

In paragraph 3, the author writes, "The president has the power to reject any laws that Congress may propose." In paragraph 2, the author writes, "The legislative branch is also called Congress." This lets us know that the legislative branch and Congress are the same thing. We also know that the president is a part of the executive branch, not the legislative branch. This means the legislative branch does not reject laws, and **(C)** is incorrect.

While the author discusses how the judicial branch determines whether or not laws are constitutional, he or she never says it holds court when laws are broken. Since the passage does not provide any information to support choice **(D)**, it is incorrect.

2) A

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In paragraph 1, the author writes, “The United States federal government consists of three branches: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch.” From this we can tell that there are three main branches of the United States federal government. Next the author writes, “Each of these branches is also responsible for checking the decisions and practices of the other branches.

This system is called ‘checks and balances.’” This lets us know that each of the three branches is responsible for checking the other branches in order to maintain a balance of power in the federal government. In paragraph 2, we learn that for a bill to become law, it must be approved by the president. This is a way the executive branch (the president) can “check” the legislative branch (Congress). This means **(A)** is correct.

In paragraph 2, we learn that “Congress is made up of two separate groups of elected officials from each of the 50 states.” This is a way in which democracy is established through equal representation of the population, it is not an example of checks and balances. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect.

In paragraph 2, the author writes, “The legislative branch is also called Congress. Congress is made up of two separate groups of elected officials from each of the 50 states: the Senate and the House of Representatives.” This lets us know that the Senate and the House of Representatives are part of the same branch. The system of checks and balances described in the passage takes place *between* branches, not within branches. This means **(C)** is incorrect.

In paragraph 4, the author writes, “The judicial branch is made up of federal judges.” This sentence describes the members who make up the judicial branch. If the decisions made by these federal judges from the judicial branch can be appealed and tried again, this does not serve as the best example of checks and balances as the system is described above. The system of checks and balances described in the passage takes place between branches, not within branches. This means **(D)** is incorrect.

3) C

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

veto (*noun*): a prohibition; a rejection of permission or allowance.

In paragraph 3, the author writes, “The president has the power to veto any laws that Congress may propose. However, if Congress strongly desires a particular bill to be passed, they have the power to override the president’s rejection.” We can use context clues—hints from known words or phrases around the unknown word or phrase—to help us figure out what veto most nearly means. First we learn that the president has the power to veto. Then we learn that Congress can override the president’s “rejection.” From this, we can understand that the presidents’ power to veto most nearly means the power to reject, disallow, or stop a proposal from continuing. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The passage does not provide evidence to support choices **(A)**, **(B)**, or **(D)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

4) C

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

In paragraph 4, the author writes, “During this review, the judicial branch will analyze the law and determine if it is consistent with the country’s constitution. If a law is determined to be unconstitutional...” Using this information, we can tell that the judicial branch analyzes laws to determine if they are consistent with the constitution, or constitutional. This lets us know that **(C)** is correct.

The passage does not provide any information to support choices **(A)**, **(B)**, or **(D)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

5) B

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In the first paragraph, the author writes, “The United States federal government consists of three branches: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch.” This statement gives us a fact about the United States federal government that also serves as the general topic of this passage. In the three paragraphs that follow, the author explains more about each of the three branches. Because we are given information based on facts about how the United States federal government operates, we can understand that this passage is best described as informative. This means **(B)** is correct.

In a persuasive passage, the author tries to persuade us to follow a particular point of view. In this passage, the author gives us information about how the three branches of government operate, citing facts like “Congress is made up of two separate groups of elected officials from each of the 50 states: the Senate and the House of Representatives” in paragraph 2. Persuasive passages would contain many more statements of opinion that could be argued, rather than simply describing how the United States federal government is organized. This lets us know that this passage is not best described as persuasive, so **(A)** is incorrect.

In a scientific passage, the author would discuss some element of science. This topic, the three branches of the United States federal government, has to do with social studies. Because the subject matter is not best described as scientific, this passage is not best described as scientific. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

The information presented in this passage is factual, not fictional. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

6) B

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

A fact is something known to exist or be true as a result of experience or observation. Facts can be proven. An opinion is a belief or judgment that rests on grounds insufficient to produce complete certainty, such as an emotion or personal bias. Opinions cannot be proven true or false. For example, it is a *fact* that roses are flowers, but an *opinion* that roses smell nice.

In the last paragraph, the author writes, “Though this system was created over 200 years ago, it is still successful in facilitating a democratic society today.” Here, we can tell that the author is expressing an opinion, because other individuals may not agree with the statement that our system is still successful in facilitating a democratic society today. In calling a system “successful,” we can tell that an opinion is being expressed. This is because the author had to personally determine the level of success or failure of the system, since he or she does not cite any other evidence for making this claim. Some people—who may not think our government operates like a true democracy should—would probably disagree with the author. For example, some people might think that since an electoral college ultimately decides the presidential election, individual citizens in the United States democracy are relatively powerless. This lets us know that the statement, “Though this system was created over 200 years ago, it is still successful in facilitating a democratic society today,” expresses an opinion. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

In paragraph 2, the author writes, “In order for Congress to make a law, a bill must be passed and then approved by the executive branch.” Using the information above, we know that we are looking for the statement that expresses an opinion. Since we could not argue with this statement, we can tell that this is a fact, not an opinion. This statement describes a process that is instituted in the

United States federal government’s law-making procedure. Thus, it expresses a fact, not an opinion. This lets us know that **(A)** is incorrect.

In paragraph 4, the author writes, “If a law is determined to be unconstitutional, it will be thrown out.” Using the information above, we know that we are looking for the statement that expresses an opinion. Since we could not argue with this statement, we can tell that this is a fact, not an opinion. This statement describes a process that is instituted in the United States federal government’s procedure for reviewing whether or not laws are constitutional. This means it expresses a fact, not an opinion. This lets us know that **(C)** is incorrect.

In paragraph 1, the author writes, “The United States federal government consists of three branches.” Using the information above, we know that we are looking for the statement that expresses an opinion. Since we could not argue with this statement, we can tell that this is a fact, not an opinion. This statement describes the basic organization of the United States federal government, therefore it expresses a fact, not an opinion. This lets us know that **(D)** is incorrect.