

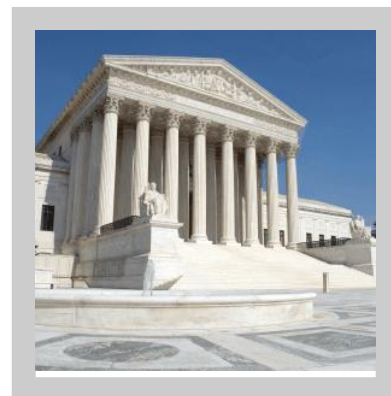
Name _____

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.
