

Power in Balance

Follow how the three branches limit one another.

SS.4.CG.1 "Foundations of Government, Law, and the American Political System"

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle the three actions that can check another branch's power. Write C, P, or J beside each circled action to show whether Congress, the president, or judges take that action.

A River Bill

- ① The United States Constitution divides the federal government into three branches. Congress, the legislative branch, writes and votes on bills, which are ideas for new laws. The president leads the executive branch and can sign a bill or veto it. Federal courts make up the judicial branch. Judges can decide whether a law follows the Constitution. This division helps prevent one part from holding all power.
- ② For example, Congress might pass a bill that sets rules for protecting a river that crosses several states. The president may sign the bill, and it becomes a law. If the president thinks the bill is harmful, the president may veto the proposed law and send it back to Congress. Congress can change the bill or try to override the veto with a two-thirds vote in each house.
- ③ Later, a court case might challenge the river law. Federal judges listen to arguments and compare the law with the Constitution. If the judges find that the law violates the Constitution, they can rule that it cannot be enforced. This check, along with the president's veto and Congress's override power, helps keep the branches balanced.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What are the three branches of the federal government, and what does each branch do?

2 What happens when the president signs a bill?

3 If the president vetoes the river bill, what two choices does Congress have?

4 How can federal judges check the power of Congress and the president after a bill becomes law?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Invent a proposed federal bill. In 3 or 4 sentences, explain what Congress does, how the president could check the bill, and how a federal court could check the law if it is challenged.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Circle the three actions that can check another branch's power. Write C, P, or J beside each circled action to show whether Congress, the president, or judges take that action. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What are the three branches of the federal government, and what does each branch do?	Congress writes and votes on bills. The president signs or vetoes bills. Federal judges decide whether laws follow the Constitution.
2	What happens when the president signs a bill?	The bill becomes a law.
3	If the president vetoes the river bill, what two choices does Congress have?	Congress can change the bill or try to override the veto with a two-thirds vote in each house.
4	How can federal judges check the power of Congress and the president after a bill becomes law?	Judges can compare the law with the Constitution and rule that it cannot be enforced if it violates the Constitution.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress passes a proposed bill that would require national parks to provide more water stations. The president vetoes the bill because of its cost, but Congress overrides the veto with two-thirds votes in each house, so the bill becomes law. A court could later rule that the law cannot be enforced if it violates the Constitution.

Accept accurate descriptions of the three branches checking one another. In the open response, the student must correctly treat a bill as a proposed law until it is signed by the president or passed over a veto.