

Power in Balance

Read how the Constitution organizes and limits national power.

SS.7.CG.3.3 "Describe the structure and function of the three branches of government established in the U.S. Constitution."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the words that state each branch's main function, then write 1, 2, and 3 beside details that describe the structure of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

Three Branches, Shared Power

- ① The Constitution divides the national government into three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. This structure prevents one person or group from holding every government power. Article I creates the legislative branch, Congress. Congress has two chambers, the House of Representatives and the Senate. Members of Congress represent people and states while they debate and pass bills, which are proposed laws. Its main function is making laws for the nation. Congress also controls federal spending and can declare war.
- ② Article II creates the executive branch. The president leads this branch, which includes the vice president and executive departments. After Congress passes a bill, the president may sign it into law or veto it. A veto sends the bill back to Congress. The executive branch carries out federal laws and directs many daily government services. The president is commander in chief of the armed forces and appoints certain officials and judges, often with Senate approval.
- ③ Article III creates the judicial branch, made up of federal courts. The Supreme Court is the highest federal court, and Congress may establish lower federal courts. Judges decide cases about laws and the Constitution. Through judicial review, courts can rule that a law or government action conflicts with the Constitution. This check helps preserve limits on government. The branches also check one another: Congress can override a veto, and the Senate confirms many presidential appointments.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What are the two chambers of Congress, and what is Congress's main function?

2 Who leads the executive branch? Describe what this branch can do after Congress passes a bill.

3 How is the judicial branch structured, and what kinds of cases do its judges decide?

4 Describe two checks on power named in the passage. Include the branches involved in each check.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Imagine Congress passes a law requiring trains to use stronger brakes. Write 3 or 4 sentences explaining how each branch could act on this law, including one way a branch could check another branch's power.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline the words that state each branch's main function, then write 1, 2, and 3 beside details that describe the structure of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What are the two chambers of Congress, and what is Congress's main function?	Congress has the House of Representatives and the Senate. Its main function is making laws for the nation.
2	Who leads the executive branch? Describe what this branch can do after Congress passes a bill.	The president leads the executive branch. The president may sign a bill into law or veto it.
3	How is the judicial branch structured, and what kinds of cases do its judges decide?	The judicial branch includes the Supreme Court and lower federal courts that Congress may establish. Judges decide cases about laws and the Constitution.
4	Describe two checks on power named in the passage. Include the branches involved in each check.	Accept any two: the president can veto a bill passed by Congress; Congress can override a presidential veto; federal courts can rule that a law or government action conflicts with the Constitution; the Senate confirms many presidential appointments.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress debates and passes a bill requiring trains to use stronger brakes. The president may sign the bill, and executive departments would carry out the new law. If someone challenges the law in court, the judicial branch can review it and rule whether it conflicts with the Constitution.

Accept accurate descriptions of the three branches' structures and functions using wording different from the passage. For the open response, look for a plausible role for each branch and an accurate check, such as judicial review, a veto, or an override.