

Power With Limits

Read how government divides power, checks power, and serves at different levels.

SS.8.CG.3 "Demonstrate an understanding of the principles, functions, and organization of government."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the main job of each branch, circle each check one branch has on another, and number the national, state, and local responsibilities 1, 2, and 3 to show how government is organized.

How Power Is Organized

- ① At a town meeting, residents ask why one official cannot simply make every decision. The U.S. Constitution answers this concern by dividing national power among three branches. Congress, the legislative branch, makes laws. The president leads the executive branch, which carries out laws. Federal courts, including the Supreme Court, make up the judicial branch and decide cases under the law. This separation of powers limits concentrated power. Each branch has a different main job, yet the branches must work together.
- ② Checks and balances give each branch ways to limit the others. For example, a president may veto a bill passed by Congress. Congress can override that veto with a two-thirds vote in both houses. The Senate considers presidential nominations for major offices and federal judges. Courts can rule that a law or government action conflicts with the Constitution. These powers do not guarantee agreement. Instead, they require officials to follow procedures and give several parts of government a voice before major decisions take effect.
- ③ Government is also organized at national, state, and local levels. This federal system lets different levels handle different responsibilities. The national government manages issues such as declaring war and coining money. States run elections and public school systems, while local governments provide services such as parks and trash collection. All levels must obey the Constitution. The rule of law means laws apply to government officials as well as residents. Constitutional rights, including freedoms of speech and religion, protect people from unfair government power.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

1 What is the main function of the judicial branch, according to the passage?

2 How can Congress check a president's veto of a bill?

3 How does the federal system divide responsibilities among levels of government? Give one example from the passage.

4 What does the rule of law mean, and whom does it include?

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

A state legislature is considering a law requiring public schools to begin later. In four or five sentences, explain which branch would make the law, who would carry it out, how courts could be involved, and one check or principle that limits government power.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline the main job of each branch, circle each check one branch has on another, and number the national, state, and local responsibilities 1, 2, and 3 to show how government is organized. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What is the main function of the judicial branch, according to the passage?	The judicial branch decides cases under the law and can rule that a law or government action conflicts with the Constitution.
2	How can Congress check a president's veto of a bill?	Congress can override the veto with a two-thirds vote in both houses.
3	How does the federal system divide responsibilities among levels of government? Give one example from the passage.	It gives different responsibilities to national, state, and local governments. Examples include the national government declaring war, states running public schools, or local governments providing parks and trash collection.
4	What does the rule of law mean, and whom does it include?	The rule of law means that laws apply to government officials as well as residents.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The state legislative branch would debate and pass the later-start law. The governor could sign or veto it, and the executive branch would help carry it out through state education officials. If someone claimed the law violated the state or U.S. Constitution, a court could decide the case. A veto is a check on the legislature, and the rule of law requires officials to follow the Constitution.

Accept equivalent descriptions of separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, the rule of law, and constitutional rights when they match the passage. For the open response, require accurate roles for the legislative, executive, and judicial branches plus one valid limit on power.