Who Protects the Water?

Trace how three branches respond to a public need

USG.C.4 "Compare the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the United States of America's government as they address the needs of the public..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline actions taken by Congress, the president or an agency, and the courts. Circle two places where one branch can limit another branch's actions.

A Bill for Cleaner Water

1. When fertilizer runoff crosses state lines and threatens drinking water, residents ask the federal government to respond. Under Article I, Congress can regulate interstate commerce and spend federal funds, so lawmakers consider a bill funding water tests and setting limits on pollution entering interstate waterways. The House, whose seats are apportioned by state population, debates one version. The Senate, where every state has two members, considers another. Representatives serve two-year terms, while senators serve six-year terms. Both chambers must agree on identical text before the bill can go to the president.

2. Before either chamber votes, committees question scientists, state officials, and industry groups about the bill's costs and benefits. Those groups can urge changes, but only elected lawmakers vote on the bill. After both chambers pass matching text, Article II gives the president a choice: sign it or veto it. A veto stops the bill unless two-thirds of each chamber votes to override. If the president signs it, Congress can authorize the Environmental Protection Agency to write detailed testing rules within limits set by the law. The agency carries out the law, while Congress can question its officials and change its funding.

3. Suppose a town sues, arguing that an agency rule exceeds the authority Congress granted. A federal district court examines the dispute and decides whether the rule follows the law and the Constitution. The losing side may appeal to a court of appeals, and the Supreme Court may choose to review the case. Under Article III, federal judges hold office during good behavior, which helps protect their independence from election pressure. Courts can set aside an unlawful rule, but they cannot write a replacement pollution law. Congress can revise the law, and the executive branch must apply the court's ruling.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the House and Senate differ in composition and terms, and what must they do together before the bill reaches the president?

2. Compare how committees and public groups can shape the bill with who has the power to pass it.

3. If the president vetoes the bill, how can Congress still make it law? What does this show about the branches' powers?

4. If an agency makes a rule beyond the authority Congress granted, what can a court do? What can Congress do if it wants different rules?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine residents ask the federal government to improve safety for medicines shipped across state lines. In four or five sentences, propose a response involving Congress, the president or a federal agency, and a federal court, and explain one check on another branch.

ANSWER KEY

Who Protects the Water?

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline actions taken by Congress, the president or an agency, and the courts. Circle two places where one branch can limit another branch's actions. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the House and Senate differ in composition and terms, and what must they do together before the bill reaches the president?	**House seats are based on state population, and representatives serve two-year terms. Each state has two senators, who serve six-year terms. Both chambers must pass identical text.**
2	Compare how committees and public groups can shape the bill with who has the power to pass it.	**Committees question people about costs and benefits, and public groups can urge changes. Only elected lawmakers vote on the bill.**
3	If the president vetoes the bill, how can Congress still make it law? What does this show about the branches' powers?	**Two-thirds of each chamber can vote to override the veto. Congress can check the president's decision.**
4	If an agency makes a rule beyond the authority Congress granted, what can a court do? What can Congress do if it wants different rules?	**A court can set aside the unlawful rule. Congress can revise the law that gives the agency its authority.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress could pass a law requiring safety tests for medicines shipped across state lines. The president could sign the bill, and a federal agency could write testing rules within the limits Congress set. If a company challenged a rule, a federal court could decide whether the agency followed the law. The court could set aside a rule that exceeded those limits, checking the agency's power.

Accept other plausible branch actions if they follow constitutional roles and identify a valid check. For the marking job, students may circle the veto override, congressional limits on agency rules, or a court setting aside an unlawful rule.