

Branches of Government

Cross-Curricular Focus: History/Social Sciences



There are three different levels of government in the United States: federal, state and local. Officials in each level are elected by the people to serve and protect the people within the **jurisdiction**, or area of authority. The federal government handles relations between the United States and other countries, including war, peace treaties and trade. It is also in charge of printing money and running the military. State governments are responsible for public education, health and safety. Local governments provide services, such as parks, police and fire protection, to members of the community.

The federal government is the national level of government. It is divided into three separate **branches**: the **legislative** branch, the **judicial** branch, and the **executive** branch. The three branches work together to make sure the power is balanced, and no individual branch becomes too powerful. This is known as a **system of checks and balances**.

Congress is the legislative branch. It is responsible for making laws. Congress is made up of two separate chambers: the Senate, and the House of Representatives. Each state is represented in each chamber. A state elects two senators to the Senate. Each state's representation in the House of Representatives is based on the state's population.

The judicial branch is responsible for interpreting laws and for hearing court cases. These court cases decide if a law has been broken or if a law is unjust. The Supreme Court is our nation's highest court and has power over all lower courts when deciding matters concerning in the U.S. Constitution.

The executive branch is responsible for executing, or carrying out, laws. The president of the United States is in charge of this branch and is assisted by his cabinet of advisors. The president signs bills into law and can also veto proposed laws. In addition, the president is commander in chief of the U.S. armed forces.

The three branches of the federal government work together to ensure that the rights of citizens are not lost. The ultimate power in the U.S. government belongs to the people. Citizens entrust their power to government officials by voting to elect them.

Name _____

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

1) What does a system of checks and balances protect against?

2) Which of the branches of the federal government is divided into two separate chambers? What are the chambers?

3) What is the difference between representation in the House and representation in the Senate?

4) What is the judicial branch responsible for?

5) The president of the U.S. is in charge of which branch of government?
