

NAME: _____



Three Branches of the Federal Government



After the war with Britain, the writers of the Constitution knew that the best system of government would be one that split its control among two or more people or groups. This idea is called **separation of powers**. They gave the new government three branches. Each one would have its own jobs and responsibilities. Also, each branch would be able to check on the others' work. This is called a **system of checks and balances**. The goal would be to make sure that the citizens' rights were always protected.

The three branches of the U.S. government are the **legislative, executive, and judicial**. The Constitution describes the duties that each branch has and the titles of the people who carry out these duties. Each branch must follow the Constitution at all times. The headquarters for each branch of government is in Washington, D.C., the nation's capital.

The **executive branch** makes sure that the laws of the country are obeyed. The **President** is the head of the executive branch. The executive branch is very large because many people and groups are needed to help the President. The **Vice President** is the President's main helper. Others who assist are the President's **Cabinet**. Article Two of the Constitution established the executive branch.



Do You Know? What are the three branches of the United States government? Which document describes the duties of each branch?

The **judicial branch** answers questions about the meaning of laws and whether or not they follow the Constitution. The highest court in the judicial branch is called the **Supreme Court**. Nine judges or **Supreme Court Justices** make decisions about laws and other court matters. The head of the Supreme Court is called the **Chief Justice**. Article Three of the Constitution established the judicial branch.



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The **legislative branch** makes laws for the nation. It is made up of **Congress** and some **government agencies**. Article One of the Constitution established the legislative branch. Congress has two parts – the **House of Representatives** and the **Senate**.

Making a new law can take time. When members of Congress decide that there is a need for a new or different law one or more of them will **(1)** introduce their ideas to their house of Congress. At that time **the bill**, or proposed law, **(2)** will be studied by a committee. If the committee members believe that the country really does need the new law, they will vote “yes” and **(3)** send it to the other part of Congress. The other house members **(4)** will vote on the bill at that time. If they vote “yes”, **(5)** the bill is then sent to the President of the United States. The President will study the bill and decide whether or not it should be a law. **(6)** If he signs the bill, it becomes a law. If he doesn’t sign the bill it will not become a law. We can say that the President **vetoed** the bill. **(7)** A vetoed bill will be sent back to Congress for another vote. If two-thirds of the members of Congress approve the bill, it will become a law anyway. This process may take as long as two years to complete.

The writers of the Constitution worked very hard to make sure that the wishes and ideas of the citizens of the United States were included at every level of the government. This is truly what a **democratic** government is all about.



Look It Up! How many presidents has the United States had? Have any of them been father and son?

