



THE YOUNG
CITIZENS
PROJECT



Shaping tomorrow. Starting now.

The 3 Branches of Government

A Student Handbook to How the U.S. Government Works



Simple explanations of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.



EDUCATE. ENGAGE. EMPOWER.

Legislative Branch



Congress is the lawmaking branch. It writes bills, debates ideas, and decides whether those ideas become laws.

1 Who's in it?



Congress has two parts: the Senate and the House of Representatives.



Senate: 100 senators total, with 2 from each state.



House: 435 representatives, with more seats for states with more people.

2 Main jobs



Writes, debates, and passes laws.



Controls taxes and government spending.



Approves declarations of war.



Checks the executive branch through hearings and investigations.



The Senate confirms many appointments and approves treaties.



Key words

- **Bill:** a proposed law
- **Congress:** the Senate + the House
- **Veto override:** when Congress passes a law even after the President says no

3 Checks on the other branches



Can override a presidential veto with a two-thirds vote.



The House can impeach federal officials.



The Senate holds impeachment trials and can remove officials.



Congress can create lower federal courts and propose constitutional amendments.

4 A simple example



If students want a new federal recycling law, members of Congress would introduce a bill. The House and Senate would debate it, vote on it, and then send it to the President.

Executive Branch

The executive branch carries out the laws. It is led by the President and includes many departments and agencies.



1 Who's in it?



President:
leads the branch and serves as head of state and head of government.



Vice President:
helps the President and can step in if needed.



Cabinet:
advisers who lead major departments.



Departments and agencies:
groups like the Departments of Education, Justice, and State that do day-to-day work.

2 Main jobs



Enforces and carries out federal laws.



Signs bills into law or vetoes them.



Leads the armed forces as commander in chief.



Appoints judges, ambassadors, and top officials.



Directs foreign policy and works with other countries.



Key words

- **Veto:**
the President's decision not to sign a bill.
- **Cabinet:**
the group of top advisers who lead departments.
- **Executive order:**
a directive from the President about how the executive branch should act.

3 Checks on the other branches



Can veto bills passed by Congress.



Can appoint Supreme Court justices and other federal judges.



Can grant pardons for many federal crimes.



Can call Congress into a special session in unusual situations.

4 A simple example



If Congress passes a school lunch bill, the President can sign it into law. Then executive agencies help put the law into action.

Judicial Branch



The judicial branch interprets laws and decides what the Constitution means in real cases.

1 Who's in it?



Supreme Court: the highest court in the United States.



Courts of Appeals: review decisions from lower courts.



District Courts: trial courts where many federal cases begin.



Judges and justices: officials who hear cases and apply the law.

2 Main jobs



Interprets laws and the Constitution.



Decides legal disputes and appeals.



Protects individual rights.



Explains what laws mean in real situations.



Reviews government actions when they are challenged in court.



Key words

- **Constitution:** the highest law of the United States.
- **Judicial review:** the power to decide whether a law or action follows the Constitution.
- **Unconstitutional:** not allowed by the Constitution.

3 Checks on the other branches



Can rule that a law passed by Congress is unconstitutional.



Can rule that an executive action breaks the law.



Can stop the government from violating rights in some cases.



Uses judicial review to interpret the Constitution.

4 A simple example

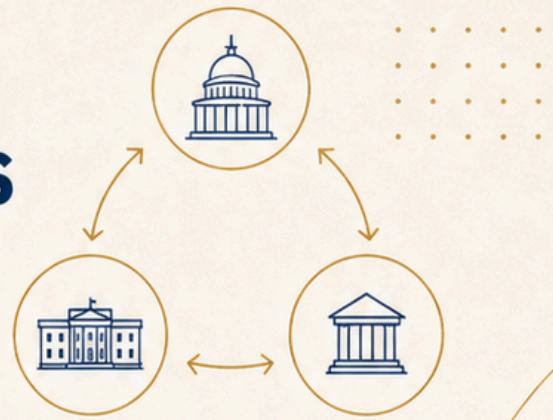


If someone believes a law violates free speech, a court can hear the case and decide whether the law follows the Constitution.



Checks & Balances

The three branches share power so no one part of government becomes too strong. This system is called checks and balances.



1 Why it matters

- Power is divided so leaders must work together.
- Rights are better protected when one branch can check another.
- Big decisions usually require more than one branch to act.

2 How the branches check one another



Congress can pass laws, control money, and override vetoes.



The Senate confirms many appointments.



The President can veto bills and appoint judges.



Congress can impeach and remove officials.



The courts can strike down unconstitutional laws or actions.



The Constitution limits what every branch can do.

3 What students should remember



Legislative makes laws.



Executive carries out laws.



Judicial interprets laws.



Learn how government works. Ask good questions. Use your voice.



THE CONCLUSION

Your voice matters.

The three branches of government work best when people understand how they work. When students learn the system, ask thoughtful questions, and take part in civic life, democracy grows stronger.

1



Know the branches

Legislative makes laws.
Executive carries out laws.
Judicial interprets laws.

2



Pay attention

Notice how decisions are made in your school, community, state, and country.

3



Participate

Ask questions, discuss issues, vote when you are old enough, and stay involved.

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Questions to keep asking

- Who makes this rule?
- Who carries it out?
- Who decides if it is fair or constitutional?

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Learning how government works is one way to shape tomorrow, starting now.



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