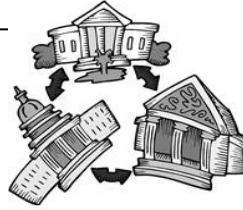


Branches of Government

Cross-Curricular Focus: History/Social Sciences



There are three different levels of government in the United States: federal, state, and local. Each of those levels is elected by the people to serve and protect the people within its **jurisdiction**, or area of authority. The federal government handles relations between the United States and other countries, including war. 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, fire, and city records, to members of the community.

The federal government, which is the national level of government, is divided into three separate **branches**: the **legislative** branch, the **judicial** branch, and the **executive** branch. The three branches work together to make sure power is balanced, and none of the individual branches becomes too powerful. This is known as a system of checks and balances.

The legislative branch is responsible for making laws. It is made up of two separate groups: the Senate, and the House of Representatives. Each state has two representatives in the Senate. Representation in the House of Representatives is based on a state's population. The House and the Senate together are called Congress.

The judicial branch is responsible for interpreting laws, and for hearing court cases to see if laws have been broken, or if laws are unjust. The Supreme Court is our nation's highest court, and has power over all lower courts when deciding matters mentioned 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. We entrust it to our 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 government is divided into two separate groups? What are the groups?

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

4) Based on the context of the next to last paragraph, what does the word **veto** mean?

5) How can the American people use their power in the government system?
