

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Three Branches of Government

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b”

When the founders were creating a new American government, the abuses of power from a single ruler were fresh in their minds. They didn’t want another king! So the United States government was designed to prevent any single person or group from becoming too powerful. We call this idea separation of powers.

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The Constitution separates the government’s power into three branches. Each branch has separate responsibilities, but they all must interact with each other in different ways. This separation of powers includes a system of checks and balances, which are ways that each branch can limit the others.

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2. b”

The legislative branch, or Congress, is responsible for writing legislation. Congress also has the power to collect taxes, borrow money for the United States, regulate commerce, coin money, and declare war. Congress has two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. This two-chamber system is an example of checks and balances within a single branch of government.

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A bill must receive at least majority approval in both the Senate and the House in order to pass. In the House, that means 218 of the 435 votes. In the Senate, senators can debate a bill for as long as they like. Prolonging debate is often called a filibuster. To make sure that senators actually vote on a bill and don’t become deadlocked with a filibuster, the senate can break up a debate and pass a bill with 60 of the 100 senators voting.

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3. b''

Congress is responsible for legislation, but the president has to sign a bill before it becomes law and also has the option to reject, or veto, the bill. A presidential veto isn't necessarily the end of a bill though. If there is enough support for the bill, members of Congress can override the veto with a two-thirds majority vote. This is part of the checks and balances plan. The president can check Congress's power with a veto, but Congress can check the president back with an override.

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4. b'

The executive branch is responsible for ensuring that laws are carried out, or executed. The president has the most power in the executive branch. The president serves as commander in chief of the armed forces. That means that they have the final say in military plans. However, Congress has the power to declare war. The president also negotiates treaties. The president is the leader of their political party. The president and their party may collaborate to draft legislation that is then promoted by the party in Congress. The president also dictates US foreign policy. In addition to the president, the executive branch includes the vice president, the Cabinet and other federal agencies.

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5. b'

The Supreme Court is the highest court in the land, and it has the final say when it comes to federal law. When laws in different places conflict, the Supreme Court settles the argument. The judicial branch also includes lower federal courts. While the legislative branch creates laws and the executive branch carries them out, the judicial branch interprets the laws and evaluates the fairness of the laws.

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