

American Government The Branches of Government

Think of the United States government as a tree. What is the thickest part of a tree? The trunk. In our government, the people are the trunk. What are the branches?

The Constitution establishes three branches of government. These branches are the **legislative**¹ branch, the **executive**² branch, and the **judicial**³ branch. Each branch has only the power given to it in the Constitution. This separation is to make sure that no one part of government ever becomes too strong. Think of the tree again. What would happen if one branch of a tree were huge and the others were just little twigs? The whole tree could topple!

To make sure that our government does not fall apart, power is carefully balanced between the branches of government. Each branch of government has a way to curb, or “check,” the power of the other two branches. For example, imagine the President does not agree with a law passed by Congress. He can **veto**⁴ it so it never goes into effect. If the law passes, and takes away someone’s rights, the Supreme Court can rule it is **illegal**⁵. The legislative, executive, and judicial branches all check up on each other in different ways.

These two important principles are called “separation of power” and “checks and balances.” Together, they help make sure the government works properly and that no one government group, or government official, becomes too powerful.

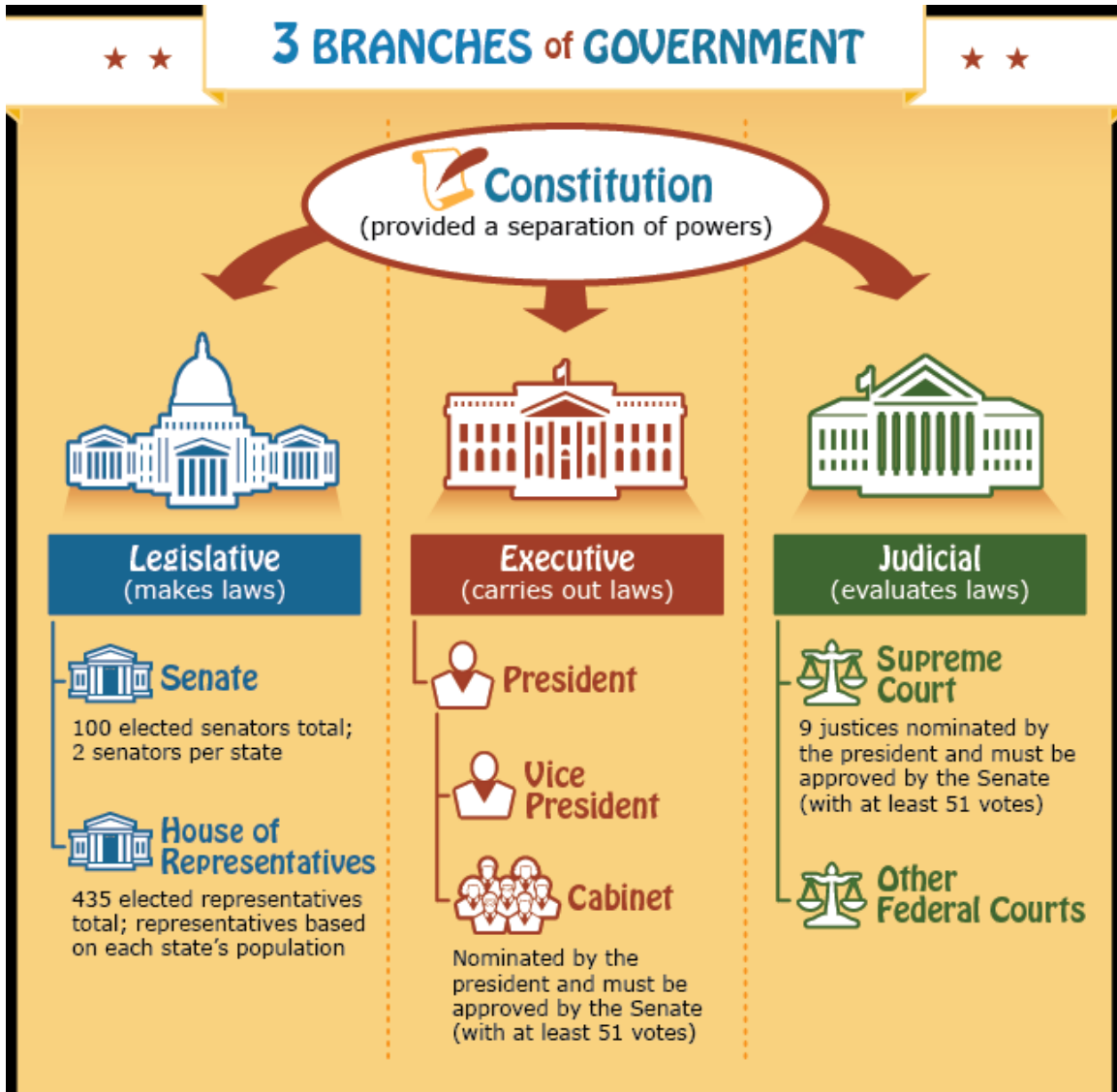
¹ **legislative** – having to do with making laws

² **executive** – having to do with carrying out plans and laws

³ **judicial** – having to do with courts and judges

⁴ **veto** – the power of a president or governor to reject bills passed by the legislative branch

⁵ **illegal** – against the law



Name: _____

Date: _____

1. What established the three branches of U.S. government?
 - a. the president
 - b. the Constitution
 - c. the king of England
 - d. the Supreme Court

2. This passage uses an analogy of a tree to
 - a. show that government is a part of nature, too.
 - b. help the reader understand the parts of government.
 - c. show the reader how cases reach the Supreme Court.
 - d. explain how government has roots and grows.

3. Based on this passage, what can prevent the legislative branch from passing a law that nobody else likes?
 - a. The Supreme Court has to give approval to all laws first.
 - b. The legislative branch cannot pass laws, only the President can.
 - c. The President could veto that law so it wouldn't take effect.
 - d. The judicial branch would elect a brand new legislative branch.

4. Read the following sentence: "If the law passes, and takes away someone's rights, the Supreme Court can **rule** it is illegal."

In this sentence the word **rule** means

- a. to measure
 - b. to hate
 - c. to decide
 - d. to suggest

5. The passage "The Branches of Government" is mostly about
 - a. trees that are important to the United States
 - b. famous moments in the history of U.S. government
 - c. the role and history of the Supreme Court
 - d. different parts of government and how they work together

6. What are the three branches of the United States government?

7. Describe a specific situation where the principle of checks and balances could be used for the good of the people.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

There are checks and balances in the United States government, and _____ no one person can become too powerful.

- a. previously
- b. as a result
- c. after
- d. on the other hand

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

The president can veto a proposed law because the constitution grants that power.

- 1. Who? the president
- 2. What can the president do? _____
- 3. Why? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** illegal: something that is not right by law.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____
