

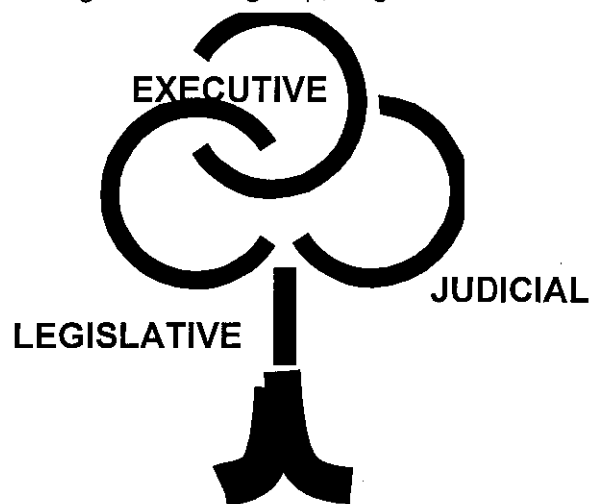
American Government The Branches of Government

Think of the United States government as a tree. What's 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 would 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 or refuse to sign it. 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 or managing affairs

³ **judicial** – having to do with a law court or the administration of justice

⁴ **veto** – the right or power of a president or governor to reject bills passed by a lawmaking body

⁵ **illegal** – against the law

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. The author included the illustration above to
 - a. confuse the reader
 - b. show the branches of government and how they work together
 - c. show how the government's branches don't relate to the trunk
 - d. give the reader an example of a healthy tree

2. All of the following have to do with the branches of government, except
 - a. separation of power
 - b. unhealthy tree branches
 - c. the executive branch
 - d. checks and balances

3. The principal of checks and balances has which effect on the three branches of government?
 - a. It gives each branch a way to spend money using bank checks
 - b. It gives each branch a plan of action
 - c. It gives each branch a way to make sure the other branches don't get too powerful
 - d. It gives each branch a holiday break

4. According to the passage, if a president doesn't agree with a law he can
 - a. tear it up
 - b. meet with Congress to complain
 - c. veto it
 - d. demand that it be changed

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

6. Look at the illustration above. The drawing is an outline of a tree that represents the three branches of government. Do you see how the branches overlap? Even though the branches are separated, they are still interlocked. Which of the two principles of government does the drawing best represent? Why did you choose your answer?

7. How do checks and balances protect the rights of the people in the U.S.?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

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

- a. for example
- b. as a result
- c. after
- d. finally

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

The President can veto a proposed law when he or she does not agree with it.

Who? the President

(can) What? _____

When? _____

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

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____
