

Three Branches of Government

Three Branches of Government is an interactive bulletin board set designed to help teach grades 3–5 how the Federal government of the United States is structured and the responsibilities of each branch. Use the content-rich panels to reinforce standards set forth by the National Council for the Social Studies listed on the following page.



Executive Branch

The President lives and works at the White House.

A president

- must be at least 35 years old
- must be a natural-born citizen
- must have lived in the United States at least 14 years

Duties of the president include:

- meeting with leaders of other countries
- developing federal policies
- preparing the national budget
- approving or vetoing acts of Congress
- commanding the United States military

Judicial Branch

The U.S. Supreme Court is the highest court in the country. It meets at the Supreme Court Building.

A Supreme Court justice

- must be trained in the law
- must be appointed by the president
- must be approved by the Senate

Duties of the House of Representatives include:

- sharing equal lawmaking responsibility with the Senate
- writing laws that involve taxes
- initiating impeachment procedures for a government official accused of a crime

Duties of the Senate include:

- sharing equal lawmaking responsibility with the House of Representatives
- approving treaties made by the president
- approving government officials appointed by the president to a special office
- holding impeachment trials for government officials accused of a crime

Legislative Branch

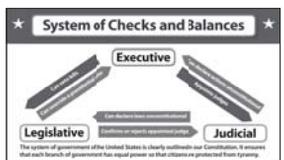
Congress is made up of two houses: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Congress meets at the United States Capitol.

A representative

- must be at least 25 years old
- must be a U.S. citizen for the past seven years
- must live in the state he or she represents

A senator

- must be at least 30 years old
- must be a U.S. citizen for the past nine years
- must live in the state he or she represents



Duties of the U.S. Supreme Court include:

- interpreting the U.S. Constitution
- applying laws according to the Constitution of the United States
- deciding the constitutionality of laws passed by states or by Congress
- deciding the constitutionality of executive branch actions and policies



National Social Studies Standards

- Understand the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.
- Understand the interactions among people, places, and environments.
- Understand interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.
- Understand how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
- Understand global connections and interdependence.
- Understand the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

Display

Separate the pieces, and laminate them for durability. Display the pieces of the set on a bulletin board, magnetic whiteboard (magnets required), or in a pocket chart.

Instruction

Use the pieces for small-group work, class instruction, or at a learning center to preview the duties of each branch of government or those individuals who hold public office.

- Have students describe why there are three branches of the U.S. government.
- Have students explain the role of each branch of government.
- Have students summarize requirements for individuals who hold the different government offices.

English Language Development

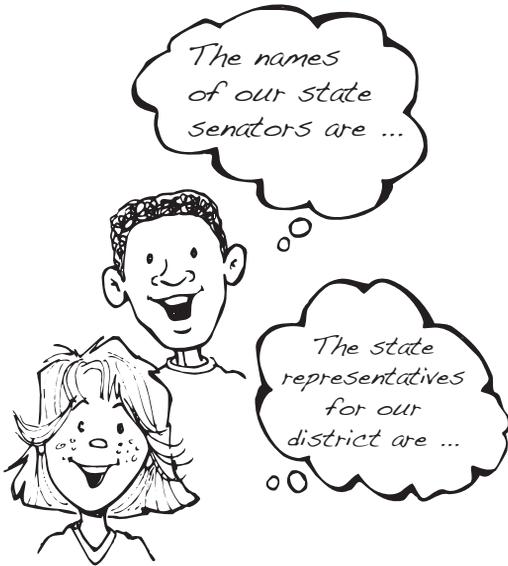
Use the pieces to introduce grade-level social studies content and academic language with pictorial input.

- Encourage groups of students to create a short skit that portrays a bill becoming a law. Encourage different groups to come up with different scenarios (e.g., one bill subject to a presidential veto, one bill signed into law by the president).

- Make a list of questions about government in the style of a *Jeopardy* game. Students must answer in the form of a question. For example, you might say *This person must be at least 30 years old, must be a U.S. citizen, and must live in the state he or she represents.* The student will reply *Who is a Senator?*

Integrating the Curriculum

- **Language Arts:** Have students research who their representatives are at the state and local levels. Ask each student to choose one of those leaders and write a summary of that person's role in the government. Or as a class, brainstorm a list of questions students have and write a group letter to that leader.



- **Math:** If the president vetoes a bill, it can still become a law if two-thirds of the Senate and two-thirds of the House of Representatives vote to override the veto. Have students calculate the answer to the following questions: *What is two-thirds of the House of Representatives? What is two-thirds of the Senate? How many votes does it take to make a majority in the House of Representatives? The Senate?*

Teacher Background

In 1787, leaders of the United States government gathered at Independence Hall to write the Constitution that has governed our nation for over 200 years. It took four months for Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, George Washington, and other important men to write the document. After many disagreements and compromises, they founded a government based on a system of checks and balances. They wanted to be certain that no one person or branch of government had too much power.

For this reason, they divided the government into three parts: the legislative, the executive, and the judicial branches. The legislative branch is the congress. It legislates or makes the laws. The executive branch is the president and his advisors. The judicial branch is the Supreme Court and the lower courts. This branch judges or interprets the laws.

Each branch of our democratic government checks and balances the power of another branch. The president can veto or reject any law proposed by Congress. Congress can override or pass a president's veto. The Supreme Court can decide a bill is unconstitutional. Each branch must approve the actions of another branch. This system keeps each part of government from becoming too strong. By balancing the power of any part of our government, the power remains in the hands of the people, and our government remains a democracy.

Vocabulary

appoint—to choose for a job or office

citizen—the resident of a city, town, or country who is entitled to the rights and privileges there (e.g., voting)

executive—having administrative or managerial duties

impeach—to charge a public official with wrongdoing in office

judicial—of or relating to judgment or judging

legislate—to make or enact laws

tyranny—government in which one ruler has absolute power

veto—a power of the president to forbid the carrying out of legislation attempted by Congress