



CHECKS AND BALANCES WORKSHEET

Checks and balances is a political principle which describes how the branches of government work with each other. The Constitution of the United States established the three branches of the United States government. These branches are the executive, legislative and judicial. The President is the head of the executive branch, which enforces the laws. Congress, made up of the Senate and House of Representatives, is the head of the legislative branch which makes the laws. The judicial branch, which interprets the laws, is made up of the Supreme Court and the federal courts.

Executive Branch

- President
- Vice President
- The Cabinet
- Departments, such as Department of Defense and Department of Education
- Boards and Commissions, such as the National Park Foundation

Legislative Branch

- U.S. Senate
- U.S. House of Representatives
- Congressional support organizations, such as the Library of Congress

Judicial Branch

- Supreme Court
- Lower courts, such as U.S. District Courts
- Special Courts, such as the U.S. Tax Court
- Court Support organizations, such as U.S. Sentencing Commission



EXECUTIVE BRANCH
The President

Can appoint Supreme Court justices and federal judges.
Can decide if presidential acts are constitutional.

Each branch is assigned specific duties under a concept called "separation of powers." No one branch of government can take control. Instead, each branch watches over the other two. This is called checks and balances.

Can veto bills and call emergency sessions of Congress.
Can impeach the President, override a veto and confirm executive appointments.



JUDICIAL BRANCH
The Supreme Court

Can interpret constitutionality of laws.
Can confirm or impeach judicial appointments, such as Supreme Court justices.



LEGISLATIVE BRANCH
Congress

Word Search

Find the hidden words from the list at the right.

Word search grid with words circled: PRESIDENT, BRANCH, SWAL, BPH, S, S, C, K, O, N, C, N, G, R, X, M, H, R, T, C, E, R, S, I, E, S, O, X, B, P, T, J, P, W, P, J, O, L, P, W, P, H, X, E, Z, L, I, Z, L, M, Z, G.

WORD LIST

- APPOINTMENTS
- BALANCES
- BRANCH
- CHECKS
- CONGRESS
- CONSTITUTION
- COURT
- EXECUTIVE
- HOUSE
- JUDICIAL
- LAWS
- LEGISLATIVE
- PRESIDENT
- SENATE
- SUPREME
- VETO

QUIZ

1. Which branch of the government makes laws? Legislative
2. Who can veto a bill which Congress passes? The President/Executive
3. Which branch of the government appoints justices to the U.S. Supreme Court? Executive
4. Which branch of the government interprets the laws? Judicial
5. Which branch of the government decides if laws are constitutional? Judicial



The U.S. Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of the United States is the highest court in the country. It is the final court in all federal court cases and all state court cases that involve federal issues.

The Supreme Court was established in Article III of the Constitution. The court is presided over by one chief justice and eight associate justices.

The U.S. Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C.

Each justice serves a life tenure, although a justice may resign or be removed through impeachment.

Justices are nominated by the President and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. This process involves all three branches of the federal government. It is part of "checks and balances," the safeguards set forth in the Constitution to prevent one branch of government from becoming too powerful.

The role of the Supreme Court has evolved over the years. Originally, the court heard very few cases. Currently, the court hears between 50-85 cases a year.

The Supreme Court rulings on major cases, called landmark cases, have had a profound impact on the U.S. The ruling in *Miranda v.*

Arizona in 1966 required that all criminal suspects be advised of their

rights. *Gideon v. Wainwright* in 1963 guaranteed a criminal defendant the right to legal counsel.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka in 1954 ended racial segregation in schools.



The 1954 Supreme Court judgment on Brown v. Board of Education which desegregated the public schools.

QUICK QUIZ

Fill in the blank with the correct answer.

What are checks and balances?

the safeguards to keep one branch from having too much power

Who nominates a Supreme Court justice?

the President

What is a landmark case?

a major case

What document established the Supreme Court?

the Constitution

What did the ruling in *Gideon v. Wainwright* guarantee?

right to legal counsel

How many justices are on the Supreme Court?

nine

What case desegregated the public schools?

Brown v. Board of Education

Who confirms a Supreme Court justice?

U.S. Senate