

# Separation of Powers

Read the text and answer the questions.

From 1781 to 1789, the 13 states joined together under the Articles of Confederation. The Articles of Confederation created a central government made of a “loose union of states” in which the central government had little authority over the individual states. The central government only consisted of a unicameral Congress. The Articles gave some powers to Congress, but the central government lacked a leader, and Congress could not collect taxes or enforce laws in all the states.

Congress quickly divided into federalists and antifederalists. Federalists wanted a stronger central (federal) government to better manage the union of states. However, the antifederalists worried that a strong central government would become too powerful over the states. The delegates of the Constitutional Convention, who met in 1787 to write a new Constitution, came to an agreement. They decided that the central government should be given more power, but also be divided into three branches of government.

To prevent the government from becoming too powerful, the new Constitution divided powers and responsibilities among three distinct branches of government. This separation of power includes the legislative branch to write the laws, the executive branch to carry out and enforce the laws, and finally, the judicial branch to interpret and apply the law in the courts. This separation of powers addressed the concerns of both federalists and antifederalists.

1. A. Define union as it is used in the text.  
B. Why was the government created by the Articles of Confederation considered a “loose union of states”?
2. Why did antifederalists oppose a strong central government?
3. Why was the government divided? Name the three branches.
4. What document established the separation of powers?
5. List three differences between the Articles of Confederation and the new Constitution.
6. How did the separation of powers address the concerns of antifederalists?



## READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT

# The Great Compromise

Read the text and answer the questions.

On July 16, 1787, the delegates to the Constitutional Convention were hard at work writing a new Constitution. However, the issue of states' representation in the legislative branch quickly became a hotly debated topic.

The Virginia Plan proposed a bicameral, or two-house, Congress. Each house would be based on proportional representation. This meant that the population of a state determined how many representatives and senators the state could have. This plan favored more populated states, while less-populated states would be at a disadvantage.

Smaller states feared that their congressional votes would always be outweighed by larger states. Thus, they introduced the New Jersey Plan, which called for a unicameral Congress, where each state was allowed one vote. The New Jersey Plan was ultimately rejected, and smaller states' delegates threatened to leave the Constitutional Convention.

The Great Compromise, which was proposed by Roger Sherman of Connecticut, blended the Virginia and New Jersey Plans. Congress would be made up of a Senate and a House of Representatives. Each state would have an equal number of senators, but the number of representatives in the House of Representatives would be based on a state's population.

1. Use Latin prefixes to explain the differences between a unicameral and a bicameral congress. What is a tricameral congress?
2. Make inferences from the text to write a definition of proportional



## READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT

# Legislative Branch

Read the text and answer the questions.

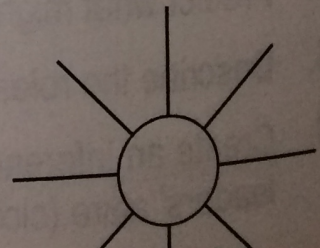
The legislative branch of the United States government is outlined in Article I of the U.S. Constitution. A bicameral Congress, having two houses, makes up the U.S. legislative branch. Citizens of the United States elect all members of the legislative branch.

Congress is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Constitution gives Congress the exclusive power to make or change laws. Both houses are essential to the lawmaking process. To pass a law, both houses of Congress must pass a bill by a majority vote. If the president vetoes it, Congress can still pass the law with a two-thirds majority vote of both houses.

Each house of Congress has additional roles and responsibilities. The Senate has sole power to confirm or reject presidential appointments and ratify treaties. The House of Representatives has sole power to initiate tax bills, impeach federal officials, and elect the president if there is a tie in the Electoral College.

Congress holds other responsibilities as well, including the power to declare war and set the annual budget. This means that Congress can levy taxes and tariffs in order to pay for government services. Congress is responsible for deciding when and how to collect taxes and use taxpayer dollars.

- Define bicameral as it is used in the text.
  - List two additional words that have the same prefix.
- From where does Congress get its power?
- How are members of Congress selected?
- Power to confirm or reject presidential appointments is an example of what two concepts established by the Constitution?
  - What two branches are directly involved?
- Create a main idea organizer to show the different functions of the legislative branch.





## READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT

# Executive Branch

Read the text and answer the questions.

The executive branch of the U.S. government is outlined in Article II of the U.S. Constitution. The executive branch is responsible for carrying out and enforcing the laws.

The head of the executive branch is the president. The president has the power to sign or veto bills proposed by Congress. The president negotiates and signs treaties, and maintains diplomatic relations with other countries. The president is the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Armed Forces. The president also has the power to pardon people convicted of federal crimes.

The president appoints Cabinet leaders to assist with his or her duties. The Cabinet consists of individuals who lead federal agencies, such as the Departments of Labor, Education, Energy, Agriculture, Justice, and others. These men and women advise the president on issues concerning their agencies. Each agency is vitally important to running various areas of the government. For example, the Department of Agriculture is in charge of food safety, protecting natural resources, and supporting farmers.

The president is faced with many challenging decisions every day. The Executive Office of the President, or EOP, is made up of advisors who support the president. The president selects his or her advisory team and the White House chief of staff oversees those advisors.

The vice president takes the place of the president when the president is no longer able to carry out his or her duties. The vice president serves as the president of the Senate and casts the deciding vote when there is a tie in the Senate.

1. Write an appropriate headline for each paragraph.
2. Create a main idea graphic organizer to identify the responsibilities of the president.
3. In what ways are the Cabinet and the EOP similar?
4. Use inferences from the text to explain the relationship between the president and the many members of the executive branch.



# Judicial Branch

Read the text and answer the questions.

The judicial branch of the United States government is outlined in Article III of the U.S. Constitution. The judicial branch contains the Supreme Court and the lower courts. Those lower courts include the 94 U.S. district courts, which try most federal cases, and the 13 U.S. courts of appeals, which handle appeals of district court cases. An appeal is a legal proceeding where a decision made by a lower court is brought before a higher court for review.

The judicial branch interprets the laws by deciding whether or not a law is allowed by our Constitution. As the highest court in the judicial branch, the Supreme Court does not actually try cases. It hears appeals from lower courts and decides whether or not their rulings are permitted under the Constitution.

The Supreme Court is made up of nine justices, including one chief justice and eight associate justices. These justices are appointed by the president and approved or rejected by the Senate. Justices serve for life unless impeached by Congress.

Supreme Court decisions are final. Many decisions have had far-reaching impacts on the United States. One example is the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case that made racial segregation in schools illegal. Another important case is the *Miranda v. Arizona* case in 1966. This case required police to inform suspects of their rights.

1. Why is the Supreme Court considered the highest court in the judicial branch?
2. Where does the Supreme Court get its power to interpret the laws?
3. What checks do the president and the Congress have on the Supreme Court?
4. In small groups, use an online resource to research the who, what, when, and where of an influential Supreme Court decision. How did the case affect the law? Create a visual presentation and share with your class.