

Explore More—Sharing Power

Directions: Listen to your teacher talk about how power is shared in the United States government. Circle any words you don't understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

Why are powers shared in the United States government?

The people who wrote the U.S. Constitution wanted to create a government that was strong enough to protect its people, but not so strong that it took away their rights. They wanted to both empower and limit the federal government. They created three branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial—that were designed to check and balance each other.

What powers does the legislative branch have?

The legislative branch, called Congress, includes the House of Representatives and the Senate. Congress has the power to make laws. Congress also has the power to impose taxes. Congress's power is kept in check by the president, the head of the executive branch, who must approve all laws.

What powers does the executive branch have?

The president executes the laws and is the commander-in-chief of the United States military. The president also has the power to veto laws. The president's power is checked by Congress. Congress can override the president's veto if it votes to pass a law by a two-thirds majority.

What powers does the judicial branch have?

The judicial branch is headed by the Supreme Court. The courts review laws to make certain they are fair and follow the Constitution. The Supreme Court consists of nine justices who are appointed for life terms by the president.

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What powers do the states have?

States have the power to control their roads, schools, and local governments. They also can impose taxes. The 10th Amendment says that any powers not given to the national government will be given to the individual states.

What powers do citizens have?

Citizens have the power to elect the president through the Electoral College. They also directly elect representatives to Congress. This gives citizens both power and representation. In addition, every citizen has certain natural rights that the government cannot take away. Perhaps the most important statement in the Declaration of Independence is, "they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Many of our laws are based on this statement. The purpose of government is to protect the rights of its citizens. The Bill of Rights describes the fundamental rights and liberties of U.S. citizens, including freedom of religion and speech, the right to own guns, and the right to have a fair and speedy trial. ❖

YOUR TURN!

1. Explain the powers of each group listed in the chart below.

Legislative Branch	Executive Branch	Judicial Branch	States	Citizens

2. Draw a picture to represent the balance of power in the United States today.

