

Branches of Government

Fifty-five delegates from twelve of the thirteen states met in Philadelphia in 1787 and worked together to create a government for the United States. Just a decade earlier the colonies had banded together to fight for their freedom from rule by Great Britain where colonists had no say in the government. The delegates wanted to insure that their new country would preserve the freedoms that they had just fought a war to obtain. When these delegates wrote the Constitution for the United States they wanted to make certain that no group in the government could get control over the government. They found a way of achieving this goal by creating three branches, or areas, of government.



The Executive Branch of government is easy to understand because the President of the United States is the main person in the Executive Branch. To keep the president from ever becoming a dictator the president is not allowed to make laws; Congress makes laws. But the president must approve the laws enacted by the Congress and the president has the power to veto, or stop, laws the Congress has passed. The president is the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. military and is also responsible for dealing with other countries.

The Legislative Branch is the place where federal (national) laws governing the country are enacted; states make laws that apply only within that state. Congress has two parts: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The number of delegates in the House of Representatives a state has is determined by its population but every state has two delegates in the Senate, two Senators. The House of Representatives creates any bills that spend federal taxpayers' money. The Senate can impeach (remove from office) government officials, including the president, and the Senate approves treaties with foreign countries.

The Judicial Branch of the federal government is headed by the Supreme Court. The main task of the Supreme Court is to interpret the Constitution to make sure that laws enacted by the federal and state governments do not violate the Constitution. Even after the two hundred years since the Constitution was written, the Supreme Court continues to enforce what the Constitution says by reviewing laws that have been passed by Congress. The Supreme Court also decides any disputes that occur between the states.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Branches of Government - Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. When the delegates from the states wrote the Constitution they
 - a. Remembered what it had been like under British rule
 - b. Wanted to limit the power of the president
 - c. Wanted to limit the power of the Congress
 - d. All of the above

2. Which of the following is NOT a branch of the federal government?
 - a. Executive
 - b. Treasury
 - c. Legislative
 - d. Judicial

3. Under the Constitution the President can
 - a. Create laws
 - b. Decide if a law is constitutional
 - c. Veto laws
 - d. All of the above

4. The House of Representatives
 - a. Has one member per state
 - b. Has two members per state
 - c. Has members based upon a state's population
 - d. Has members appointed by the Supreme Court

5. Who can impeach the president?
 - a. The Senate
 - b. The House of Representatives
 - c. The Executive Branch
 - d. The Supreme Court

6. The Judicial Branch includes
 - a. The President
 - b. Congress
 - c. The Supreme Court
 - d. All of the above

Name: _____ Date: _____

Branches of Government - Short Answer Questions

1. Why did the delegates to the Philadelphia Convention write a constitution with three branches of government?
2. How does the Constitution prevent a president from becoming a dictator?
3. How does the Constitution prevent Congress from passing unreasonable laws?
4. What is the difference between a state law and a federal law?
5. The Supreme Court decides disputes between the states. Do some research and write a short report about the dispute between Kansas and Colorado over rights to the water in the Arkansas River.
6. When the Constitution was being written, the delegates from large and small states discussed how divide up the delegates to Congress. Large states proposed the number of delegates be decided by population and small states wanted a fixed number of delegates per state. How is the way Congress is set up a compromise between these two points of view?
7. Which branch of the government would you like to work in? Explain why you selected that branch.

Branches of Government - Answer Key

Multiple Choice

1. d.
2. b.
3. c.
4. c.
5. a.
6. c.

Short Answer

1. Just a decade earlier the colonies had banded together to fight for their freedom from rule by Great Britain where colonists had no say in the government. The delegates wanted to insure that their new country would preserve the freedoms that they had just fought a war to obtain. When these delegates wrote the Constitution for the United States they wanted to make certain that no group in the government could get control over the government.
2. The president is not allowed to make any laws.
3. Unreasonable laws can be enacted by Congress but the president has the power to veto laws enacted by Congress. Citizens can bring unreasonable laws before the Supreme Court to find out if they are constitutional. The Supreme Court can overturn a law that is unconstitutional.
4. A state law is a law enacted by a state legislature and it applies only within the boundaries of that state. A federal law is enacted by the U.S. Congress and applies to the entire country.
5. Individual response
6. The number of delegates in the House of Representatives a state has is determined by its population but every state has two delegates in the Senate. This is a compromise; large states get more Representatives but small states have equal representation in the Senate.
7. Individual response

The Constitution and Branches of Government

When the Constitution was written in 1787 the leaders who wrote it wanted to make certain that one person or group could not control the new government that they were creating. To achieve this separation of power, as it is called, the Constitution calls for three branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial. Each branch of government has certain responsibilities that are defined in the Constitution and particular roles that officials perform.

The legislative branch of government defined in the Constitution is the U.S. Congress. The Congress is called bicameral, meaning that there are two legislative groups in the Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives today has 435 members and the number of Representatives from each state depends on the population of the state. Every state is divided into congressional districts that are established after the official U.S. census (count of citizens) that occurs every ten years.

As the U.S. population grows and moves around the country, the number of representatives per state and their congressional districts can change. The main job of Representatives is to represent the people of their districts in Congress and Representatives have a two-year term of office. The Constitution states, "All Bills for raising Revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives."

The Senate is composed of two members from each state elected by the people in that state so there are currently 100 Senators. Senators serve for a six-year term of office. Senators have the power to impeach the president and the Senate must approve any treaty negotiated by the President. While Representatives must be 25 years-old, Senators must be 30 years-old.

The Constitution establishes one and only one Supreme Court and a number of other federal courts that the Congress establishes. Currently there are 94 U.S. district courts and 13 courts of appeals. The Constitution states that Supreme Court justices, court of appeals judges, and district court judges are nominated by the President and confirmed by the United States Senate. The Constitution does not specify the number of justices (judges) on the Supreme Court but Congress established in 1869 that there is one Chief Justice and eight associate justices. Justices serve for life or until they retire.



Name: _____ Date: _____

The Constitution and Branches of Government - Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. How many branches are there in the U.S. government?
 - a. Two: legislative and judicial
 - b. Two: executive and bicameral
 - c. Three: legislative, executive and judicial
 - d. Three: bicameral, executive and judicial

2. The U.S. Congress is composed of
 - a. The House of Representatives
 - b. The Senate
 - c. Both a. and b. above
 - d. None of the above

3. Congressional districts are determined mainly by
 - a. The Senate
 - b. The U.S. census
 - c. The Supreme Court
 - d. The President

4. Which federal official has a six-year term of office?
 - a. Representative
 - b. Senator
 - c. President
 - d. Supreme Court Justice

5. Who selects Supreme Court justices?
 - a. The president
 - b. The House of Representatives
 - c. The other Supreme Court justices
 - d. The American people by an election

6. How many justices are there on the Supreme Court?
 - a. Five
 - b. Seven
 - c. Nine
 - d. Eleven

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Constitution and Branches of Government

Short Answer Questions

1. Explain what the term bicameral means.
2. How many U.S. Representatives are there and how are they chosen?
3. How many U.S. Senators are there and how are they selected?
4. How many Supreme Court justices are there and how are they selected?
5. Do some research on the Internet by visiting www.house.gov. Which state has the most Representatives? Why does this state have the most Representatives?
6. Why do you think that the Constitution states, "All Bills for raising Revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives?"
7. President Franklin Roosevelt tried to increase the number of justices on the Supreme Court from nine to fifteen, meaning he could possibly appoint six new justices. Congress did not approve his plan. Do you think the separation of power built into the Constitution worked in this case? Explain why or why not.

The Constitution and Branches of Government

Answer Key

Multiple Choice

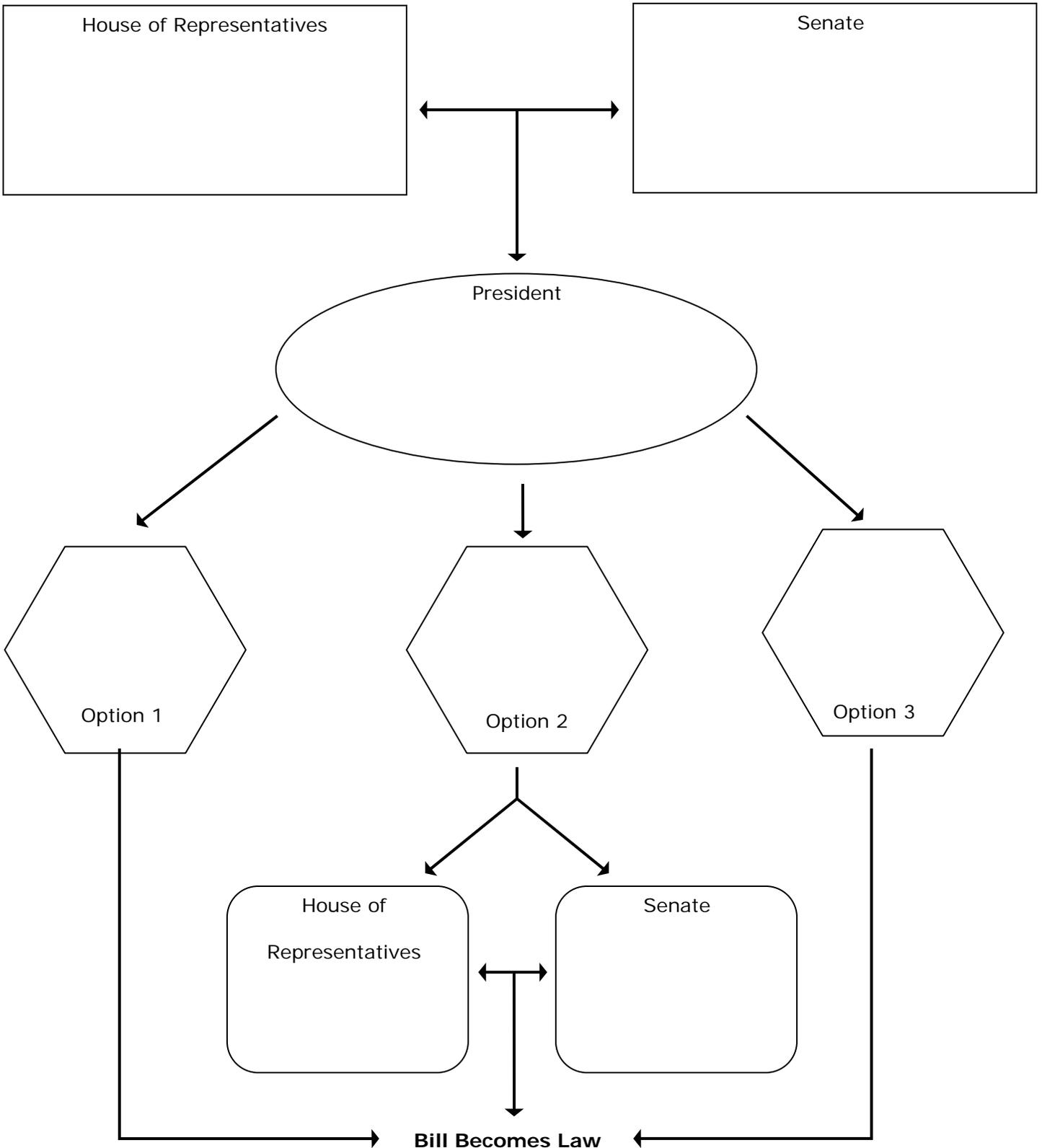
1. c.
2. c.
3. b.
4. b.
5. a.
6. c.

Short Answer

1. Bicameral means that there are two legislative groups in the Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate.
2. The House of Representatives today has 435 members and the number of Representatives from each state depends on the population of the state. Each state is divided into congressional districts and a Representative is elected by the voters in that district to represent them in Washington.
3. The Senate is composed of two members from each state elected by the people in that state so there are currently 100 Senators.
4. The Constitution states that Supreme Court justices, court of appeals judges, and district court judges are nominated by the President and confirmed by the United States Senate. The Constitution does not specify the number of justices (judges) on the Supreme Court but Congress established in 1869 that there is one Chief Justice and eight associate justices.
5. California, the state with the largest population, has the most Representatives, 53.
6. One of the reasons for the Revolutionary War against Great Britain was taxation without representation. The new American leaders wanted to insure that taxes were approved by the House of Representatives which is supposed to be the body that represents the wishes of the American citizens.
7. Individual response

How a Bill Becomes a Law

Explain what happens in stage of the process of a bill becoming a law.



How a Bill Becomes a Law (Answers)

Explain what happens in stage of the process of a bill becoming a law.

