Name _____ Date _____

The Three Branches of Government: Checks and Balances

Directions: Read both tables before you begin. One describes the three branches, and the other shows how they check each other.

The Three Branches

The three branches of the national government

Branch	Who is part of it	Its main job	How long members serve
Legislative branch	Congress, which has two parts: the Senate and the House of Representatives	Makes the nation's laws	Senators: 6-year terms. Members of the House: 2-year terms.
Executive branch	The president, the vice president and the departments that help them	Carries out the laws	The president: 4-year terms
Judicial branch	The Supreme Court and other national courts	Decides what laws mean and whether they follow the Constitution	Supreme Court justices: for life

1. Match each item to its job or purpose.

Write the letter of the matching answer on each line.

1. _____ Legislative branch
2. _____ Executive branch
3. _____ Judicial branch
4. _____ The Constitution

Choices for question 1

A. Decides what laws mean and whether they follow the Constitution
B. Carries out the laws
C. Chooses the members of Congress
D. Makes the nation's laws
E. Writes the news about the government
F. The plan that sets up all three branches

2. Congress has two parts. What are they?

A. The Senate and the House of Representatives
B. The Senate and the Supreme Court
C. The president and the vice president
D. The Supreme Court and the other courts

3. Fill in the term lengths shown in the branches table.

Word bank

two • six • four • ten

A senator serves for _____ years at a time. A member of the House serves for _____ years at a time.

4. Supreme Court justices can serve for life. Which branch are they part of?
A. The judicial branch B. The executive branch C. The legislative branch

Checks and Balances

Some ways each branch can check, or limit, another branch

Branch	A way it can check another branch
Executive branch	The president can veto, or reject, a bill that Congress passes.
Legislative branch	Congress can override a veto. If two-thirds of the Senate and two-thirds of the House vote for the bill, it becomes a law anyway.
Legislative branch	The Senate votes on whether to approve the people the president chooses to be judges.
Judicial branch	Courts can decide that a law does not follow the Constitution.

5. Congress passes a bill, and the president vetoes it. What does veto mean?
A. To reject a bill
B. To sign a bill so it becomes a law
C. To change the words of a bill
D. To send a bill to the Supreme Court

6. The president vetoes a bill. How can the bill still become a law?
A. The vice president signs it instead.
B. Half of the states agree to it.
C. Two-thirds of the Senate and two-thirds of the House vote for it.
D. The Supreme Court signs it.

7. The president chooses a person to be a judge. Which group votes on whether to approve that choice?
A. The vice president
B. The Supreme Court
C. The House of Representatives
D. The Senate

8. A court decides that a law made by Congress does not follow the Constitution. Who is checking whom?
A. The president is checking the courts.
B. The courts are checking the states.
C. Congress is checking the courts.
D. The courts are checking Congress.

9. Why does the Constitution divide power among three branches?
A. So the president can make every law alone
B. So each branch can ignore the other two
C. So the courts can choose the president
D. So no one branch becomes too powerful