

READING COMPREHENSION

A BALANCE OF POWER

The writers of the U.S. Constitution didn't want to put too much power in the hands of one person. So they created three branches of government—the **Legislative** (Congress), **Executive** (President), and **Judicial** (federal courts, headed by the U.S. Supreme

Court). The Constitution gives each branch powers that limit the powers of the other two. These limits are known as *checks and balances*.

Read about how the system of checks and balances works, then fill in the blanks below.

Congress, which consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate, makes the country's laws.

- If the President vetoes (rejects) a law, Congress can override the veto by a two-thirds vote of both the House and Senate.
- Another check on the Executive branch is the power of Congress to appropriate funds (decide how much money will be spent for what purpose).
- The Senate must approve treaties and presidential appointments.
- The House can impeach (accuse of "high crimes or misdemeanors") U.S. officials—including the President and Supreme Court Justices; the Senate has the power to try impeached U.S. officials and, if they are convicted, remove them from office.

The **President** enforces U.S. laws, commands the armed forces, makes treaties, and appoints judges, ambassadors, and other officials.

- The President can check the power of Congress by vetoing bills, although Congress can override a veto by a two-thirds vote of each house.
- The President appoints Supreme Court Justices, although the Senate must approve the appointments.
- The President can pardon persons for "offenses against the United States," except in cases of impeachment.

The **Supreme Court** hears and decides "all cases . . . arising under this Constitution" involving U.S. laws and treaties. Most of its cases are appeals from state or federal courts. It can try cases involving disputes between states.

- The Court can check Congress by ruling that a law is unconstitutional.
- The Court can check the Executive branch by ruling that one of its actions is unconstitutional.

QUESTIONS

1. Which branch of government is responsible for making the country's laws? _____
2. The veto is a way in which the President can check the power of _____.
3. Under what circumstance can the Supreme Court nullify a law passed by Congress? _____
4. What does *impeach* mean? _____
5. Which body has the power to impeach a government official? _____
6. Which body has the power to try an impeached official? _____
7. In which branch would legal disputes between states be settled? _____
8. From where do most cases reviewed by the Supreme Court come? _____
9. In 1919 to 1920, President Woodrow Wilson wanted the U.S. to sign a treaty to join the League of Nations (an early version of the United Nations). But _____ refused to approve the treaty, so the U.S. did not join the League.
10. Would you rather be the President, a member of Congress, or a Supreme Court Justice? Why?

