The framers of the U.S. Constitution realized that too much power can be dangerous. To prevent any part of the government from becoming too powerful, the Constitution created three separate branches of the federal government. The Constitution gives each branch its own powers. This separation of powers creates a system of checks and balances. Each branch can check (limit) the power of the other two. This helps maintain a balance of power among the three. Study the diagram to see how this works.

**Checks and Balances**

The president can veto (reject) bills passed by Congress.

- Congress can override a veto by a two thirds vote of each chamber.
- Congress appropriates funds to run the government and approves programs.
- The Senate must approve treaties and presidential appointments.
- Congress can impeach and remove a president for crimes and misconduct.

The president appoints Supreme Court justices and other federal judges.

- Federal judges are appointed for life, freeing them from executive control.
- Federal courts may declare executive branch actions unconstitutional.

Federal courts can declare laws passed by Congress unconstitutional.

- If the Supreme Court rules that a law is unconstitutional, Congress can revise the law, write a new one, or propose amendments (changes) to the U.S. Constitution. Changes must be ratified by three quarters of the states.
- Congress may impeach and remove federal judges from office.
- The Senate approves appointments of judges.

**WORDS TO KNOW**

- **appropriate (v):** to set aside for a specific use
- **impeach (v):** to bring a charge of wrongdoing against a public official
Checks and Balances cont’d.

Questions

1. What does it mean to check the power of a branch of government?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

2. Who can veto legislation passed by Congress?
   ______________________________________________________________

3. How can Congress override a presidential veto?
   ______________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

4. Which branch has the power to appoint Supreme Court justices and other federal judges?
   __________________________________________________________________________

5. How does Congress check that power?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

6. How can federal courts check the president’s power?
   ______________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

7. How can federal courts check the power of Congress?
   ______________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

8. What limits the president’s power to make treaties with other countries?
   __________________________________________________________________________

9. Suppose a law has been declared unconstitutional. What can be done to try to make it constitutional?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

10. What is meant by “separation of powers”?
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________