The Founding Fathers did not want all the powers given to the government to be controlled by one man, or even just a few men. They feared if a small group was given too much power, the United States would once again be ruled by a tyrannical government like it had been under England. To avoid such a situation they divided the new government into three branches: the executive, the legislative and the judicial. The executive branch is headed by the President of the United States who carries out federal laws and recommends new ones, directs national defense and foreign policy and performs ceremonial duties.

The legislative branch is headed by Congress which consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Their main task is to make the laws. The judicial branch is headed by the Supreme Court. This branch interprets the laws, decides cases in which federal laws apply, settles troubles between states.

The Constitution built in a “check and balance” system so that no one branch could become too powerful. Each branch is controlled by the other two in several ways. The President may veto a law passed by Congress, but Congress may override his veto with a two-thirds vote. The Senate must approve any treaty the President makes and approve many of the appointments he makes. Any money the President needs for national defense must come from the Congress. The Supreme Court may check the Congress or the President by declaring a law unconstitutional. And, the Court is appointed by the other two and may be impeached by Congress.

Label the branches of the government above and write in their Constitutional duties.
### Power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress passes a law.</th>
<th>The President may</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The President may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Supreme Court may</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The President vetoes a law passed by Congress.</th>
<th>Congress may</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The President appoints a Supreme Court judge.</td>
<td>The Senate may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Supreme Court judge shows misconduct in office.</td>
<td>Congress may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The President makes a treaty with another country.</td>
<td>The Senate may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President enforces a law.</td>
<td>The Supreme Court may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The President asks for money for defense.</td>
<td>Congress may</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Name**

Fill in the chart below. Use the information from the preceding page.

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### Reading a Chart

#### Checks and Balances

This chart details the system of checks and balances as defined in the Constitution. Study the chart, then answer the questions below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXECUTIVE BRANCH</th>
<th>Checks on the Legislative Branch</th>
<th>Checks on the Judicial Branch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| (President carries out laws) | - Can propose laws  
- Can veto laws  
- Can call special sessions of Congress  
- Makes appointments  
- Negotiates foreign treaties | - Appoints federal judges  
- Can grant pardons to federal offenders |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEGISLATIVE BRANCH</th>
<th>Checks on the Executive Branch</th>
<th>Checks on the Judicial Branch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| (Congress makes laws) | - Can override President's veto  
- Confirms executive appointments  
- Ratifies treaties  
- Can declare war  
- Appropriates money  
- Can impeach and remove President | - Creates lower federal courts  
- Can impeach and remove judges  
- Can propose amendments to overrule judicial decisions  
- Approves appointments of federal judges |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JUDICIAL BRANCH</th>
<th>Check on the Executive Branch</th>
<th>Check on the Legislative Branch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Supreme Court interprets laws)</td>
<td>- Can declare executive actions unconstitutional</td>
<td>- Can declare acts of Congress unconstitutional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Which branch of government appoints federal judges? Which branch must approve these appointments?

2. How can the judicial branch limit the power of the other two branches?

3. **Draw Conclusions** Based on this chart, which branch of government do you think is the most powerful? Explain your answer.
Understanding Checks and Balances

On the blanks provided in the following diagram, write the letters of the various checks and balances listed below, as they are applied from one branch of government to another. The first one is already filled in for you as an example.

**SEPARATION OF FEDERAL POWERS: Examples of Checks and Balances**

- **LEGISLATIVE BRANCH**
  - Can impeach and remove President from office
  - Can declare executive acts unconstitutional
  - Can impeach judges and change number of Supreme Court justices
  - Can veto bills
  - Can grant pardons and reprieves to federal offenders

- **EXECUTIVE BRANCH**
  - Can propose amendments to overrule judicial decisions
  - Can overrule President's veto
  - Can propose bills and call special sessions of Congress
  - Can appoint Supreme Court justices and other federal judges
  - Can refuse to confirm judicial appointments

- **JUDICIAL BRANCH**
  - Can control patronage
  - Can refuse to ratify treaties
  - Can declare laws unconstitutional
  - Can refuse to confirm appointments

**Checks and Balances**

A. Can impeach and remove President from office
B. Can declare executive acts unconstitutional
C. Can impeach judges and change number of Supreme Court justices
D. Can veto bills
E. Can grant pardons and reprieves to federal offenders
F. Can propose amendments to overrule judicial decisions
G. Can overrule President's veto
H. Can propose bills and call special sessions of Congress
I. Can appoint Supreme Court justices and other federal judges
J. Can refuse to confirm judicial appointments
K. Can control patronage
L. Can refuse to ratify treaties
M. Can declare laws unconstitutional
N. Can refuse to confirm appointments