

## Three Branches of Government

### Who does the U.S. Constitution give the most power to?

#### Background:

As a lifelong student of history and civics, Truman believed it was essential Americans understand how their government works. He was especially committed to educate young people about their rights and responsibilities, a mission for his presidential library.

In order to understand democracy we must look at the Constitution of the United States. It is the supreme law of the land. After our nation became free a small group from 13 colonies met to decide if or how to govern as one nation. Rather than a king making decisions they wanted a government that would give the power to the people. They wanted to find a way to make a stronger nation where all the colonies could come together. It was a difficult summer making decisions to bring the nation together but the U.S. Constitution was written and signed on September 17, 1787. They never expected this document to last over 10 years much less over 200 years. The U.S. Constitution is a living document that still continues today.

They framed a U.S. federal government into three different branches. Each branch has equal powers because they have different jobs and each checks on the other. That's why we say our government is based on checks and balances. They are the Executive Branch, Legislative Branch and Judicial Branch.

President Truman was in the Executive Branch and one of his jobs was Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. One of the jobs of the Legislative Branch is to make laws. In 1947, Congress in the Legislative Branch passed the Taft Hartley Act. It prevented workers from stopping work to strike for more money and stopped presidents from taking over the company. President Truman vetoed the bill concerned that it would be unfair for workers against their employers. Congress voted to override his veto and passed the law anyway.

Later in 1952, the U.S. troops were fighting in Korea when the steel workers stopped work and demanded more money. The steel company wouldn't give it to them so no steel would be produced if there was a strike. President Truman was concerned the soldiers would not be able to get the supplies they needed. After other solutions failed he signed an Executive Order to take over the steel corporations. They sued the president saying he did not have the power to take over their corporation. So who decides? The Judicial Branch, they used the U.S. Constitution and the Taft Hartley Act to decide the president does not have the power to take over private property. President Truman was not very happy with this decision but knew this was the way our democracy works. The U.S. Constitution allows a balance of power from each branch through checks and balances.

**Standard:**

1.B.4: Explain the major purposes of the U.S. Constitution. With assistance, research and analyze the text of the U.S. Constitution to determine important principles such as limited government, rule of law, majority rules, minority rights, separation of powers, checks and balances and popular sovereignty.

2.D.4. Identify and explain the functions of the three branches of government in the federal government.

**Materials Needed:**

Print/copy Political Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

[https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon\\_analysis\\_worksheet\\_novice.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon_analysis_worksheet_novice.pdf)

Print/copy political cartoon

Copy U.S. Constitution preamble and worksheet

**Vocabulary:**

1. 3 branches of government - division of government power into 3 branches
2. Legislative Branch - Congress has the power to make laws
3. Judicial Branch - Supreme Court has the power to interpret and applies laws
4. Executive Branch - President and others with the power to enforce the laws
5. Veto - the power of one branch to cancel or postpone the decisions of another branch
6. Override - the power to reject a decision of another branch
7. Interpret - to describe the meaning of something and make sense of it in order to explain it
8. U. S. Constitution - A document with laws and principles by which the United States is governed. The law of the land.
9. Executive Order - a rule or order issued by the president
10. Commander in Chief - supreme commander of armed forces

**Procedures:**

Activity 1: Read background information

Activity 2: Discuss vocabulary

Activity 3: Rock-Paper-Scissors and 3 Branches of Gov't Activity - flow charts

Activity 4: Analyze political cartoon

Activity 5: Rewrite preamble of U.S. Constitution

**Assessment:** In groups, students will be instructed their group has crash landed on a deserted island with 100 native islanders and no chance of being rescued. They must decide how they are going to live together. Think about the kind of place they want to live in and what it would look like? Would it be a community? Would it be a safe, peaceful and happy place or not? What could go wrong and how would they handle it? Each group should create a constitution including a preamble to address their purpose and rules for their new home. The plan/government should answer the following questions..

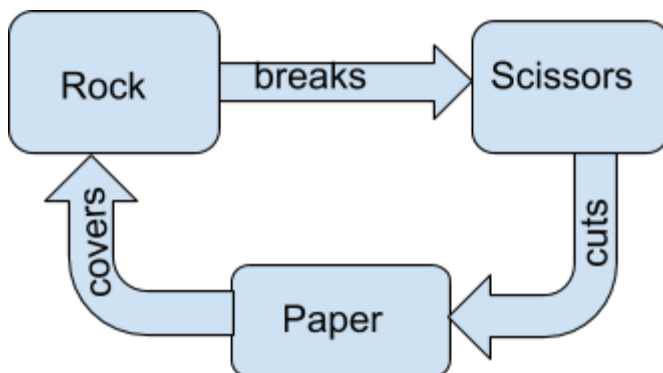
- How will they get food? What kind of food is available? Will everyone share or be on their own? What if others don't have food?
- Where will people live? What kind of shelter?
- Will there be rules? What kind of rules? How would you enforce those rules?
- Will you need a community area for meetings, celebrations or planning?

Each group should name and present their island. As a class, discuss, compare and contrast to the U.S. Constitution.

**Activity 1:** Discuss and play Rock-Paper-Scissors

- Which is the best?
- Which is the most powerful?
- Which is the strongest?

Draw and label flowchart together on the board:

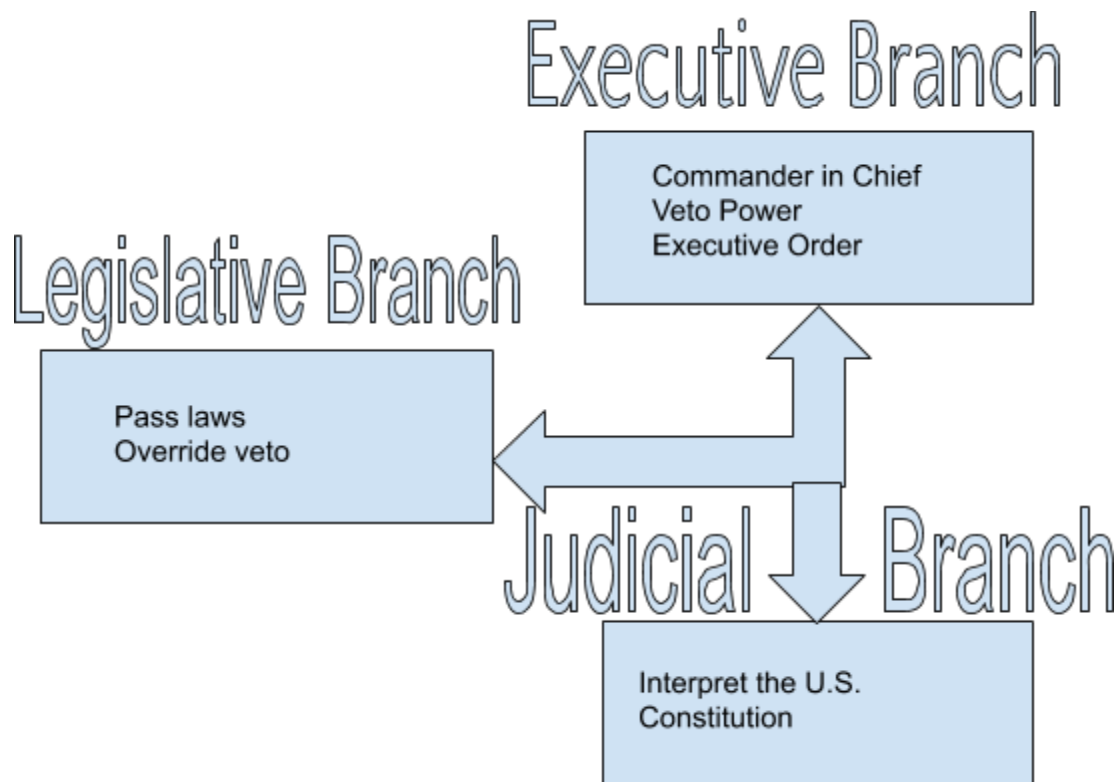


Discuss and compare to 3 branches of government:

- Which is the best?
- Which is the most powerful?
- Which is the strongest?

Ultimately one is not more powerful than the other because they have different duties and powers. The U.S. Constitution is designed for a balance of power through checks and balances.

In partners, students will draw and label a flowchart using **all** 10 vocabulary words. Separate into 3 branches of government and match each word with its specific branch using the background information.




## Activity 2: Presidents and Power, is there a limit?

. Ask students to observe the cartoon by asking three visual thinking questions.

- What do they notice in the cartoon?
- What else do they notice?
- What makes them say that?

As a class, groups or individually students will analyze the political cartoon and complete the worksheet.

### Analyze a Cartoon



#### Meet the cartoon.

What do you see?


Is the cartoon?

BLACK AND WHITE     COLOR

Is there a caption?


YES     NO


If so, what does the caption tell you?




#### Observe its parts.

Are there people, symbols, or objects in the cartoon?

  
PEOPLE

  
SYMBOLS

  
OBJECTS

What are the people doing in the cartoon?

What are the objects used for in the cartoon?

Write two words that describe the cartoon.

#### Try to make sense of it.


*Answer as best you can. The caption, if available, may help.*

What do the symbols stand for in the cartoon?

Who drew the cartoon?



When do you think this cartoon was drawn?

What is the main idea of the cartoon?  
List two parts (words or objects from the cartoon) that support the main idea.



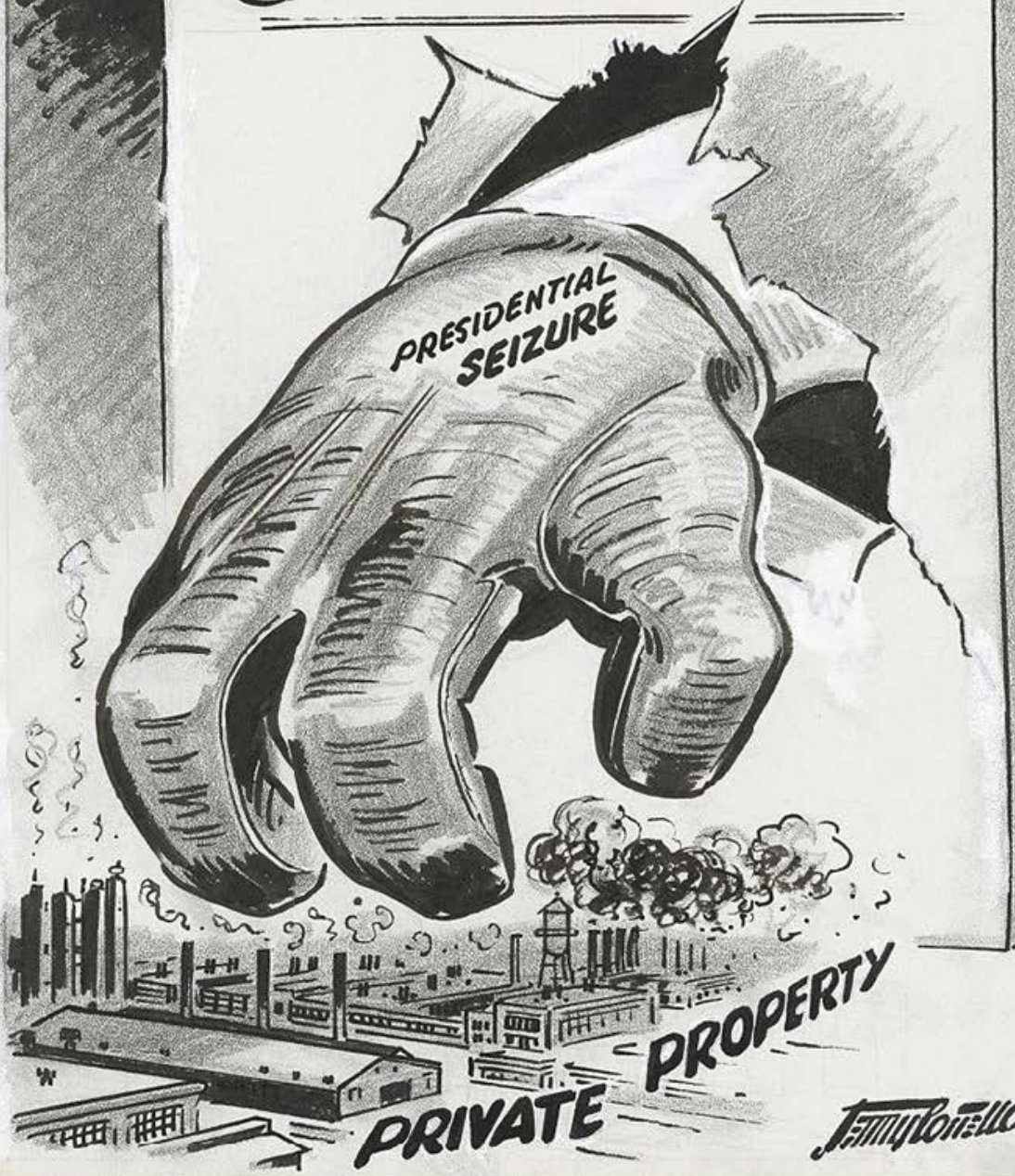
#### Use it as historical evidence.

Where do you think we could find out more information about the people, symbols, or objects in the cartoon?



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# The CONSTITUTION



PRESIDENTIAL  
SEIZURE

PRIVATE  
PROPERTY

Jimmy Donatello

**Activity 3:** The framers stated their purpose and 5 goals in the preamble of the U.S. Constitution. Students should rewrite this paragraph and replace the underlined phrases with their own words.



**(Preamble)**

# ***We the People*** of the United States,

in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

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