

# LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Legislative Branch, or Article I of the U.S. Constitution, is part of the federal (national) government of the United States. This branch has the unique and important task of creating laws for the country. The power of the federal government is divided between the three branches to have a separation of powers. This means that each branch has a different role and responsibility in ensuring that the federal government operates without becoming excessively powerful. The Legislative Branch is also known as Congress. Congress is bicameral which means that it has two houses. Congress is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Each of these is referred to as a "house". The Senate, also known as the "upper house," has 100 members with each state having two Senators. The House of Representatives, also known as the "lower house" has 435 members but the number of representatives per state is based on population. The people who make the laws are called Legislators. Members of Congress work in the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, DC.

There are different election processes and qualifications for each of the houses. Article I of the U.S. Constitution outlines the requirements to be a Senator. A Senator must be at least 30 years old. They must be a U.S. citizen for at least nine years and live in the state they represent. Article I also outlines the requirements to be a Representative. The person must be 25 years old. They must be a U.S. citizen for the last seven years. They also must live in the state that they hope to represent.

The Legislative Branch helps make sure that the laws of the federal government are fair and just. An idea for a law, called a bill, must go through many steps called the Legislative Process. A bill must be brought to Congress by either a Senator or a Representative. Then, the bill gets reviewed further and researched. The bill is debated by the House of Representatives and the

# TEXT MARKING



What is separation of powers?



What article is the Legislative Branch?



What are the qualifications to be a Senator?



What does bicameral mean?

# WORDS TO KNOW

**UNDERLINE (IN PASSAGE)  
THEN DEFINE**

excessively -

debated -

Senate. The majority of one house has to vote for and approve the bill, then it goes to the other house for ratification (approval). If both houses vote on the bill and it gets approved, then it goes to the President. The President can do two things with a bill. He/She can either sign it into law or veto (reject) it. If the President vetoes it, then it goes back to Congress. Congress, then, can override the veto by voting on it again. For a veto to get passed by Congress, it must receive two-thirds votes in both houses. This system ensures that no part of the Legislative Branch can become too powerful at any given time.

While the main focus of the Legislative Branch is drafting and passing new legislation (laws), it also has non-legislative (non-lawmaking) powers. Congress can declare war on another country or territory. There are often long debates before Congress declares war. Congress also negotiates treaties with other countries, when it is needed. Congress has the task of creating a budget from which the government operates. This budget is proposed and reviewed each year in depth. Congress can levy (collect) taxes and makes sure those taxes are being spent in the way that they should be spent. Members of the Senate can approve various high positions such as a Supreme Court Justice and the members of the President's Cabinet.

The longest Article in the Constitution is Article I. It has ten sections, and it discusses the Legislative Branch in detail. While the Legislative Branch is only one of the three branches, it proves a vital role in ensuring the federal government's operation. The United States Founding Fathers designed the Legislative Branch to help ensure that no one in a government position could abuse their powers. This idea has worked so well that many other countries have modeled their governments with a similar structure. The Legislative Branch helps ensure that citizens get fair laws. The Legislative Branch also ensures that the other branches of government are operating smoothly.

## TEXT MARKING



What happens if the president vetoes a bill?



How many sections does Article I have?



What does the word levy mean?



What does the word ratification mean?

## WORDS TO KNOW

**UNDERLINE (IN PASSAGE)  
THEN DEFINE**

treaties -

override -

# SUPREME COURT

The Supreme Court is the highest, most powerful court in the United States. This court is also at the top of the Judicial Branch (Article III) of government. **The main job of the Judicial Branch is to interpret the laws.** The Supreme Court is located in Washington D.C. It is a large, prominent white building with massive columns out front. The Supreme Court helps maintain a fair and just legal system for anyone accused of a crime. This court has a wide impact on people across the United States by overturning and ruling on laws and cases.

Judges of the Supreme Court are called Justices. There are usually nine Justices but there have been as few as six. **The head of the Justices is called the Chief Justice.** The remaining eight Justices are called Associate Justices. Since the 1800's, the Justices have worn long black robes as a tradition. **The Justices are appointed (chosen) by the President.** However, the Senate must also approve them as well. This process is called Senate Confirmation.

Justices serve in the Supreme Court until retirement, impeachment, or death. **Impeachment is when a governing government official is accused of misconduct while in office.** There is no term limit for this position, like there are in other government positions. A life term allows Justices to not worry about popularity and therefore base their court decisions on the law, not winning an election. There are no age requirements, no education requirements, no experience requirements, and no citizenship requirements to become a Justice.

Mostly, the Supreme Court deals with cases that have been appealed (request a review) in lower courts. An appeal is made if someone is not happy with the ruling of a case. Not all appeals will make it to the Supreme Court, though. In fact, the Justices vote on which cases will and will not make it. Four out of nine Justices must agree to hear a case. Some cases go directly to the Supreme Court, but this is rare. Most of these cases involve a case against

# TEXT MARKING



What does the word impeachment mean?



Who appoints Justices to the Supreme Court?



What is the head Justice called?



What is the main job of the Judicial Branch?

# WORDS TO KNOW

**UNDERLINE (IN PASSAGE)  
THEN DEFINE**

interpret -

misconduct -

two different types of government in the United States. For example, one state may have a court case against another state for water or river rights.

The Supreme Court is different because there is not a jury. After the Justices have heard the case, they will deliberate and give an opinion on the case. A majority opinion reflects the views of more than fifty percent of the Justices. When a Justice disagrees with the decision of the majority, a dissenting opinion is given.

The Supreme Court makes sure that laws follow the principles and guidelines outlined in the Constitution. The Supreme Court can claim that a law is unconstitutional and overturn it. It can also overturn a previous decision that was made. This happened during the Civil Rights Movement. In 1896, the Supreme Court allowed segregation in public places, including schools, in the Plessy v. Ferguson case. In 1954, however, the Supreme Court overturned their earlier decision by making it illegal to segregate schools in the Brown v. Board of Education case.

The Supreme Court hears 80-100 cases per year, and many are highly publicized because they impact people across the nation. Every Supreme Court session starts with the words "Oyez, Oyez," which means to pay attention. The annual court sessions run from the first Monday of October through late June or early July.

The Supreme Court was first founded in 1789 as the Nation's Court. Construction of the Supreme Court building began in 1932. It took three years to complete and cost approximately \$9 million. It was made of marble from Vermont, Georgia, Alabama, and Italy.

The Supreme Court often faces complex decisions. Since this court is the highest court and final ruling, many controversial cases end up here. The Supreme Court can also review the decisions of Congress and even the President. This helps keep one section of the government from becoming too powerful (checks and balances).

## TEXT MARKING



What is a dissenting opinion?



What does "Oyez, Oyez" mean?



How much did the Supreme Court cost?



What is a majority opinion?

## WORDS TO KNOW

UNDERLINE (IN PASSAGE)  
THEN DEFINE

deliberate -

overturn -

# SPARK SOME *creativity*

ESCAPE ROOMS

SCAVENGER HUNTS

SPY MYSTERY

THINKTIVITY

SECRET MESSAGES

TEXT DETECTIVE

BREAKOUTS

READING CHALLENGE

INTERACTIVE NOTEBOOK

COLOR BY NUMBER

DIGITAL ESCAPES

DIGITAL BOARD GAME

GOOGLE SLIDES

TASK CARDS GAME

GOOGLE FORMS

PUZZLE STATIONS

BOOM CARDS

READING PASSAGES

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