

# OUR GOVERNMENT

## Fascinating Facts

- The Constitutional Convention of 1787 lasted almost four months—a long time for the writers of the Constitution to agree!
- Thomas Jefferson did not go to the Constitutional Convention, because he was in France, serving as our country's ambassador.
- Three-fourths of the states must agree to an amendment to the Constitution in order for it to become law.

Genre	Comprehension Skill	Text Features
Nonfiction	Main Idea and Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diagram</li> <li>• Captions</li> </ul>



Scott Foresman Social Studies



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by Kristin Cashore





In 1787 our nation's leaders met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Together they wrote the Constitution of the United States. Today our government is based on that Constitution. In this book you will learn about how the Constitution makes our country both strong and free.



### **Vocabulary**

**government**

**citizen**

**legislative branch**

**bill**

**executive branch**

**judicial branch**

**democracy**

**amendment**



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## The United States Constitution

In 1787 our nation's leaders met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This meeting is called the Constitutional Convention.

People including George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and James Madison were at the meeting. They talked about how to build a strong **government** for America. They discussed ideas for the United States Constitution.

Our nation's leaders met at the Constitutional Convention in 1787.



This is the Constitution of the United States of America.



The Constitution explains how our government should be run. The Constitution says that the government should be strong and fair. **Citizens** of the United States have rights and freedoms. The Constitution also says that the government should be in three branches, or parts.





The United States House of Representatives meets and votes in this room.



## The Legislative Branch

One branch of our government is called the **legislative branch**. It is also called Congress. Congress has two parts: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The job of Congress is to make our nation's laws.



First, the members of Congress get an idea for a law. They write it down. It is then a **bill**. They talk about it. Some bills then get voted on.


If the bill wins enough votes, it is then sent to the President. If the President signs the bill, it will become a law. Sometimes the President may decide to veto the bill, or say no to it. Then Congress can vote again. This time, if the bill gets enough votes, it will become a law.

Congress also has other jobs. For example, Congress raises money for the government. It decides when to go to war, and it makes new courts.

This building is called the United States Capitol. The House of Representatives and the Senate meet inside the Capitol.





 The President works and lives in the White House.

## The Executive Branch

The President is part of the **executive branch**. The Vice President and all of the people who work for the President are also part of the executive branch.

The President has a very powerful position. The President makes sure that the laws are followed.



The President is in charge of the nation's armed forces. The President also tells Congress about the condition of the country.



The President works in an oval room at the White House called the Oval Office.





## The Judicial Branch

The other branch of our government is called the **judicial branch**. The Supreme Court and other federal courts make up the judicial branch. The Supreme Court is the most powerful court in the United States. The President chooses the judges who serve on the Supreme Court. The judges on the Supreme Court are called justices.

The United States Supreme Court works in this building. The words "Equal Justice Under Law" are written on the front of the building.



Congress decides how many justices are on the Supreme Court.



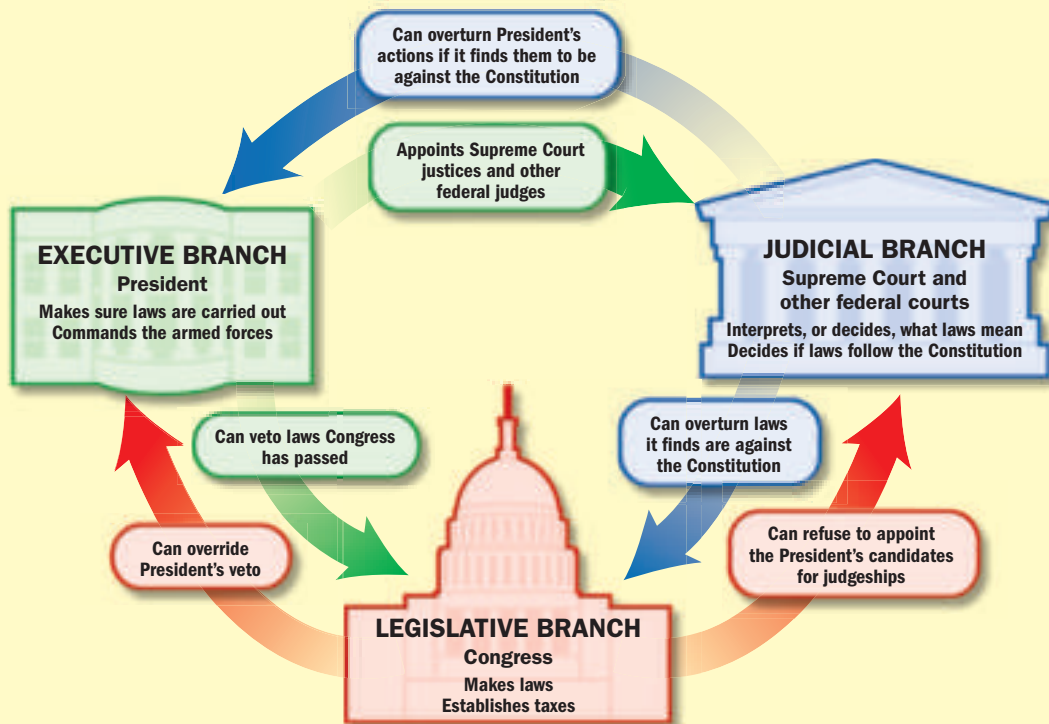
It is the Supreme Court's job to decide what each law means. The Supreme Court also decides if the laws are fair under the Constitution. If the Supreme Court decides that a law is unfair, then it will no longer be a law.



## Checks and Balances

When our nation's leaders wrote the Constitution, they did a smart thing. They made a system of checks and balances. What are checks and balances?

Our leaders did not want any branch of the government to get too powerful. They made sure that each branch could check, or stop, the power of every other branch.

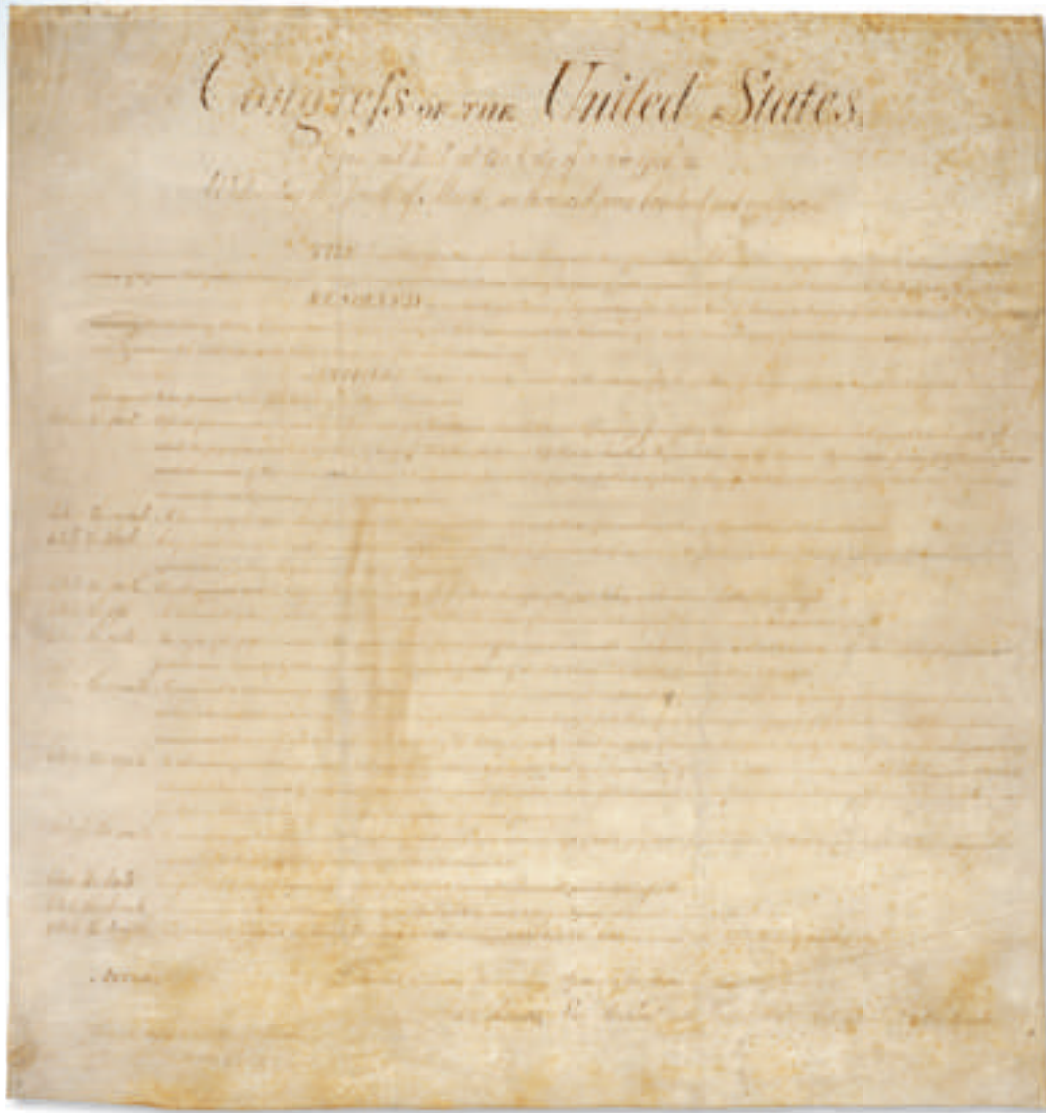


Here is an example of how the system of checks and balances works. The President can veto a law that Congress passes. However, Congress can pass a law that the President has vetoed. Even if that law passes, the Supreme Court can decide that the law is unfair.

The citizens of our country also have the power to check the government. They do this with their votes. The United States is a **democracy**. The people in our country choose leaders by voting.



In the United States, we elect our leaders. This gives us power over our government.



## The Bill of Rights and Other Amendments

We can add to our Constitution. An addition to the Constitution is called an **amendment**.

The first ten amendments to the Constitution are called the Bill of Rights. They are a list of the most important freedoms that citizens have. For example, citizens have freedom of speech, a free press, and freedom of religion.

The Constitution was written in 1787. The world has changed a lot since then. Amendments allow the Constitution to keep up with changes in the world.



The Bill of Rights names some of our most important freedoms.





In creating the Constitution, our founding leaders came up with a strong plan for the country's government.



## A Strong Democracy

The writers of the Constitution built a strong government for the United States. We have many freedoms. The government uses checks and balances. The Constitution can be changed with amendments.



The writers of the Constitution wanted a strong country in 1787 and in the future. They wanted a country that would last.

Today our government is still based on the Constitution. It looks like our founding leaders were successful.



The bald eagle is our national bird. It is a symbol of the strength and freedom of the United States.

## Glossary

**amendment** an addition

**bill** an idea for a law that is put into writing

**citizen** an official member of a country

**democracy** a system of government in which every citizen has the right to take part

**executive branch** the part of the government that makes sure our nation's laws are followed

**government** the leaders who run a country and the laws that the citizens of the country follow

**judicial branch** the part of the government that decides if our nation's laws are fair under the Constitution

**legislative branch** the part of the government that makes our nation's laws

### Write to It!

What is a right that you think all people should have? Suppose that you are writing an amendment to the Constitution. Write one paragraph in which you explain this right. Start your paragraph: "The people of the United States should have the right to . . ."

**Write your paragraph on a separate sheet of paper.**

#### Photographs

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