

Our Community

3 Studies Weekly

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Structure of Government

There are basic functions and structures at each level of government. These are guided by the Constitution. In the United States, we have a **federal** government. National and state governments share power in the federal system of government. We have state governments that lead our individual states. We also have local governments that lead our counties, cities, and towns. We have representatives at all levels of government.



Structure of Government

Three Branches of Government

The Constitution says that the United States should have three branches of government. Each branch has its own structure. Each branch also has its own leaders and processes. The three branches were designed to limit the power of each branch. This prevents one person or group of people from having all of the power.

The three branches are the **executive**, **legislative**, and **judicial** branches. These

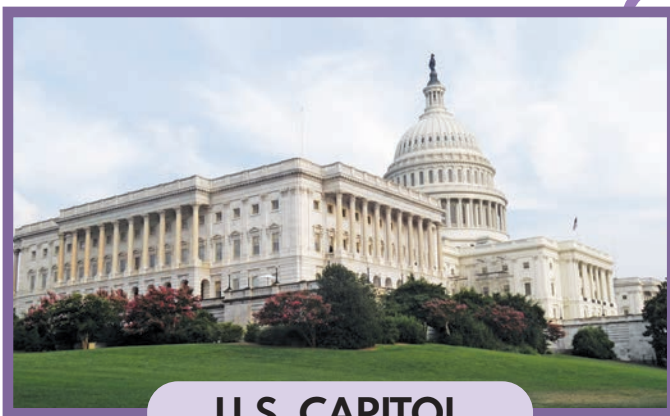
branches of government distribute the power of the government and provide a check and balance. For example, the president may **veto**, or block, a law passed by Congress. The Senate must confirm major executive appointments. The courts may also declare acts of Congress unconstitutional. This basic structure of the national government has been used to guide the development of state and local governments.



WHITE HOUSE

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

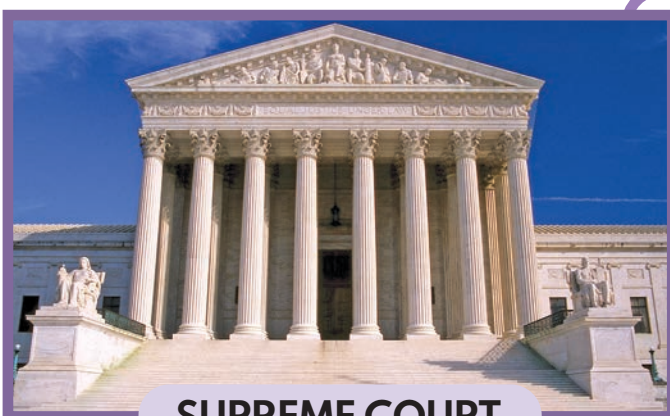
- the president is the leader
- chosen by voters
- helps enforce laws



U.S. CAPITOL

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

- is the Senate and House of Representatives
- elected from all states
- make the laws



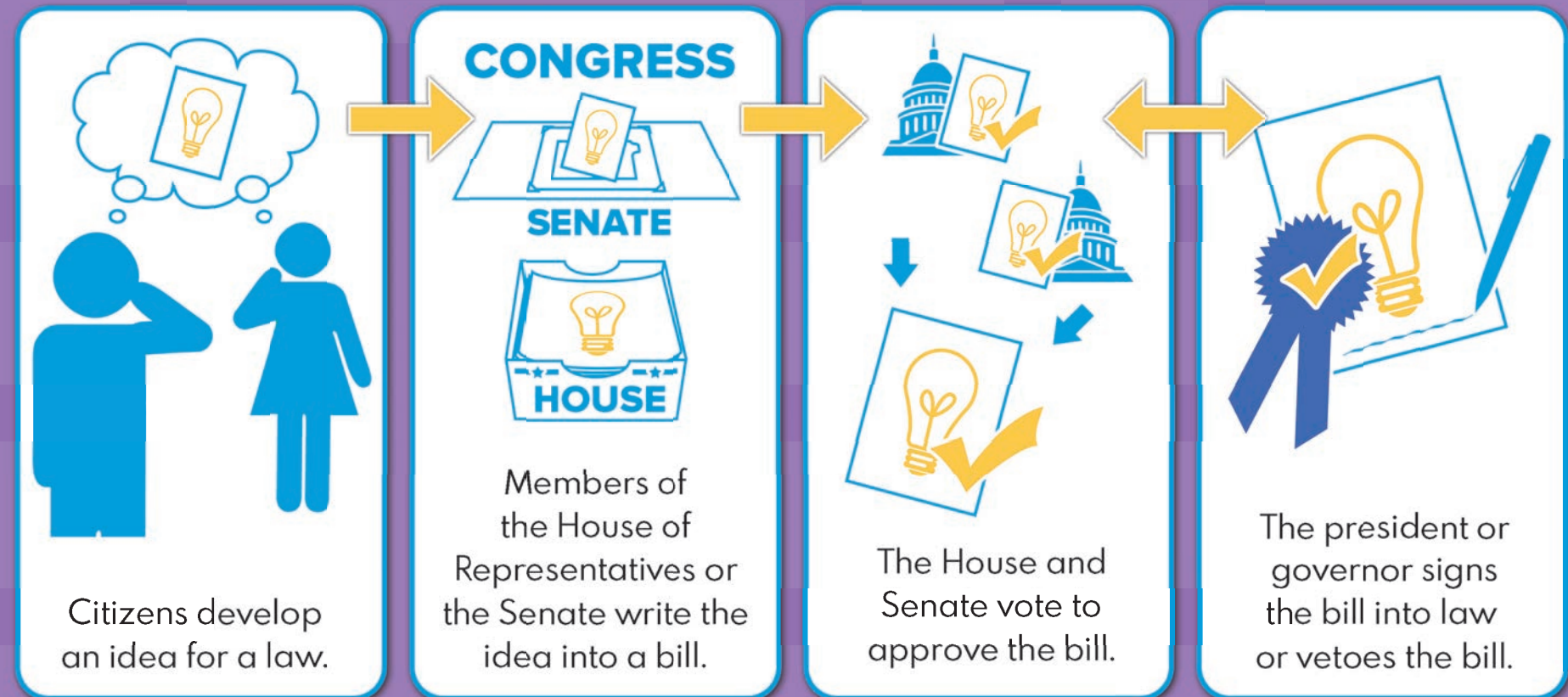
SUPREME COURT

JUDICIAL BRANCH

- system of courts and judges
- chosen by the president, confirmed by senators
- decide if laws are constitutional

How a Bill Becomes a Law

We have a representative government in the United States. Ideas for laws come from citizens. We elect leaders to represent us. The legislative branch is also known as Congress. **Congress** is made up of members from the Senate and the House of Representatives. An elected representative from Congress writes down ideas to make our country better. We call this written idea a **bill**. The bill needs approval from both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The bill goes to the executive branch if approved. In the federal government, the executive branch is the President of the United States. The governor is the executive branch in your state. If the executive branch agrees with the bill, it is signed into law. The executive branch can **veto**, or say no, to the bill if they don't agree. If that happens, the bill goes back to Congress.



Voting and Elections

The Constitution is not just a list of rights and laws for everyone in our country. It also tells us how our leaders should be chosen. At the national level, citizens vote to elect the president. They also elect representatives to serve in the House of Representatives and the Senate. State and local governments are structured like the federal government.

Citizens interested in serving in the government participate in a campaign process. Each candidate shares what they believe about different issues. Citizens study each candidate carefully and vote for the one who

best represents their viewpoints. The candidate with the most votes wins! To vote, citizens need to be 18 years old or older. Citizens can vote for leaders of their community, state, or country.



Name _____

State Government

State governments also have elected officials and three branches of government. The leader of the state is the **governor**. The governor appoints officials and signs or vetoes bills passed by the state legislature. The governor is also the commander-in-chief of the state's military forces.

Local Government

The executive branch of the local government includes the mayor and the city manager. Local communities elect the mayor. The city manager is hired by the mayor or the city council. The city, town, and county council members represent the legislative branch. Together they carry out the city or town council's policies. The state constitution gives them the authority to make local policies and laws.

Government Services

A **tax** is money that citizens pay to the government. Taxes are also added to the cost of goods and services. The government uses tax money to pay for community services that make our lives better. All levels of government provide services to ensure safety, well-being, and opportunity within the community.

Examples of government services include police officers and firefighters. They protect us and keep us safe. Free health clinics and emergency rooms are government services. Public and city parks provide human recreation. They also protect wildlife. Schools and libraries help us get educated. All these services are paid for by the taxes that community members pay.

