HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE STANDARDS OF LEARNING
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Civics and Economics
CE.6 Study Guide

STANDARD CE.6
-- NATIONAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

The structure and powers of the national government.

The Constitution of the United States defines the structure and powers of the national government.

The powers held by government are divided between the national government in Washington, D.C., and the governments of the 50 states.

What is the structure of the national government as set out in the United States Constitution?

What are the powers of the national government?

Legislative, executive, and judicial powers of the national government are distributed among three distinct and independent branches of government.

The legislative branch
• Consists of the Congress, a bicameral legislature consisting of the House of Representatives (435 members, based upon populations of the states) and the Senate (100 members—two per state)
• Makes the laws of the nation
• Approves the annual budget
• Confirms presidential appointments
• Raises revenue through taxes and other levies
• Regulates interstate and foreign trade
• Declares war

The executive branch
• Headed by the president of the United States, the chief executive officer of the nation
• Executes the laws of the land

• Prepares the annual budget for congressional action
• Appoints cabinet officers, ambassadors, and federal judges
• Administers the federal bureaucracy

The judicial branch
• Consists of the federal courts, including the Supreme Court, the highest court in the land
• The Supreme Court exercises the power of judicial review.
• The federal courts try cases involving federal law and questions involving interpretation of the Constitution of the United States.

STANDARD CE.6B
-- SEPARATION OF POWERS

The principle of separation of powers and the operation of checks and balances.

The powers of the national government are separated among three branches of the government in ways that limit any one branch from abusing its power.

How do the separation of powers and the system of checks and balances protect against an abuse of power by any one branch of the national government?

Separation of powers
The Constitution of the United States in Articles I, II, and III defines the powers of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the national government.

Checks and balances
Each of the three branches of the national government limits the exercise of power by the other two branches.

The legislative branch
The Congress checks the president when legislators
- override presidential vetoes
- impeach and convict a president.

The Congress checks the courts when legislators
- confirm or refuse to confirm federal judges/justices
- impeach and convict judges/justices.

The executive branch
- The president checks Congress when the president
  - proposes legislation
  - prepares an annual budget for Congress to approve
  - call special sessions of Congress
  - vetoes legislation Congress has passed.
- The president checks the courts when the president appoints judges/justices.

The judicial branch
- The courts check Congress when judges/justices declare acts of Congress to be unconstitutional.
- The courts check the president when judges/justices declare executive actions to be unconstitutional.

STANDARD CE.6
-- LAWMAKING PROCESS

The lawmaking process (national level).

Officials who are elected to serve in the national legislature make laws.
All citizens can learn the importance of the individual’s participation in the policymaking process through direct participation and simulations.

Which branch of the national government has the power to pass laws?
National laws are made by Congress.

Legislative powers
- Expessed: Specifically listed in the Constitution of the United States
- Implied: Used to carry out expressed powers

How does Congress make laws?
The lawmaking process in Congress
- Introducing a bill by a Senator or Representative
- Working in committees
- Debating the bill on the floor of each house
- Voting on the bill in each house
- Sending the bill to the president to sign into law

Elected officials in Congress write laws and take action in response to problems or issues.

Individuals and interest groups help shape legislation.
The formal powers of Congress are limited by the Constitution of the United States.

How can citizens learn the importance of the individual’s participation in the policymaking process?
Citizens (including students) learn the importance of the legislative process through direct involvement and/or simulations.

STANDARD CE.6d
-- EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The roles and powers of the executive branch (national level)
The executive branch plays a key role in the policymaking process.
Presidential power is broad in both domestic and foreign affairs, but there are limits on what the president can and cannot do.

What are the roles and powers of the president?
The president exercises power as
- chief of state: Ceremonial head of the government
- chief executive: Head of the executive branch of government
- chief legislator: Proposer of the legislative agenda
- commander-in-chief: Head of the nation’s armed forces
- chief diplomat: Architect of American foreign policy
- chief of party: Leader of the political party that controls the executive branch
- chief citizen: Representative of all of the people.

Presidential power has grown in the years since the Constitution was ratified.