

### Three Branches: Now and Then

When we elect the President, we're continuing to follow rules that were set up in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Constitution was the document that was used to organize the United States government in 1788. There had been a government since the United States became an independent nation. Through the Constitution, the leaders made it clear how the government of the new country would work.

The Constitution set up three divisions of national government: the executive branch, legislative branch, and judicial branch. The Executive branch is headed by the President. So when we elect the President we are giving that person an important job. It's the Executive branch that makes sure the laws of the nation are followed, from the original Constitution through the recent decisions of the Supreme Court. The armed forces report to the President. So does the department of the Treasury and other units of government that are responsible for the country's transportation, health, education, and foreign policy.

### Executive Branch

Look in the Newspaper to find examples of actions by the Executive Branch. Write one example in the second column. In the third column, tell how that action will affect your community.

Branch of Government	Current Situation	How It Will Affect My Community
Executive		
Judicial		
Legislative		

### **Justice**

The Judicial branch includes the Supreme Court and the federal courts. Those courts make decisions about cases that usually start out in local courts. The Supreme Court decides whether a law is constitutional or not. For example, in a very important case for civil rights, the Supreme Court decided that some states' requirements for voters were unconstitutional. With that decision, African-Americans who had been denied the right to vote based on race got to register and vote. The President appoints the Supreme Court justices. The Supreme Court justices are able to continue in their positions once they are appointed. They are not elected—they are selected. Once they are chosen, they stay in that position until they decide to retire. So when we elect a President we give that leader the opportunity to decide how the Constitution will be applied.

Look in the Newspaper to find an example of an issue that might get to the Supreme Court. Write that issue in the Current Situation column. Then in the third column note how a decision about that issue by the Supreme Court could affect your community.

### **The Law-Makers**

The legislative branch includes the Senate and House of Representatives. The Representatives have two-year terms, so your community will be electing Representatives this year. Each state has a number of Representatives based on the population of the state, so the census of 2000 will affect how many Representatives states have in the future. There are two Senators for each state, each with a six-year term. Congress makes the laws for the nation. The Congress also must approve the President's choices of individuals to head the divisions of the Executive Branch and the Supreme Court before those nominees get their jobs. Congress also must approve the President's budget proposal.

Look in today's newspaper for an example of a situation in which a national law has affected Chicagoland. Include that information in the chart.

Discussion Points:

*The following questions all require you to analyze and infer.*

- Why would the Constitution have organized a government with three separate branches?
- Why might the Constitution have set up terms of 6 years for senators and 2 for legislators?
- Which branch makes the greatest difference? Why do you think this is the one?

### Think It Through

What kinds of qualifications should someone have to be elected to the Legislative Branch? Make a list of the qualities you think are most important to do that job. For each qualification, explain why you think it's necessary.

What kinds of abilities should someone have to be President? Make that list now and include a reason for each qualification. Then keep adding to your list as you complete this unit.

Pretend you're the President. You have a vacancy on the Supreme Court. Write the job description. What kind of person will you seek for this job?

### Get It Across

Write a letter to the incoming President. We're not sure who that will be, but whoever wins the election, that person probably will appoint a judge to the Supreme Court. In your letter, advise the new President what you think he should consider in looking for someone to take that place on the court.

### Newspaper Connection

Write a news briefing for the President. The President needs to know what's happening. Every day, members of his staff give him information to keep him informed. From today's Newspaper, choose what you think are the five most important situations he should know about and write what is happening in just a few sentences for each of the five.