

society executive constitution
judicial congress legislative

The Three Branches of the Treehouse

Society

“The official meeting of the Treehouse Society will now come to order,” Ernie said, slamming a hammer down on the card table in front of him.



Leo and Judy, the two other members of the Treehouse Society, each gave a solemn nod.

Ernie continued, “Our first item of business is to agree on a constitution for our club. I think our first rule should be that no vegetables are allowed, ever.”

“What? I love vegetables! You cannot make rules just to please yourself,” Judy exclaimed.

“Vegetables are disgusting, and since I am the president of our club, I get to make the rules,” Ernie said.

“That’s not fair! Leo, what do you think?” Judy asked.

With the two other members staring at him, Leo blushed. He did not like confrontation. "Maybe we could make a rule that only some vegetables are allowed?"

"That's still not fair! How do we decide which vegetables should be banned? Broccoli? Zucchini? Asparagus? Where does it stop?" Judy asked. She felt her anger rising. Ernie was not happy either. They had just started the Treehouse Society and already they were having problems.



Just then their argument was interrupted by a knock at the treehouse door. The door swung open, revealing two gentlemen dressed in strange, old-fashioned clothes.

"I am John Locke," the taller man said, bowing politely. "And this is Charles-Louis de Secondat."

"Please, call me Charles," the second man said, also bowing. "We hear you are having problems establishing your club."

Judy nodded. "Yes, we can't agree on the rules. I don't think one person should be able to make all the rules and have all of the control, like some sort of king. We should all have a say."

“When America was first getting started, John and I helped solve the exact problem you are now facing. The founding fathers wanted a country that would not be ruled by one person with all the power,” Charles said.

“I came up with the idea of a separation of powers,” John said. “I proposed that there be different branches of the government that would have separate responsibilities and powers. Mr. Locke smiled. “I did not want any one part of the government to have power over the other parts.”

“Cool,” Judy said. “But how does it work?”

“I used John’s idea of a separation of powers and suggested the three branches of government that the United States still uses today: the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch,” Charles said.

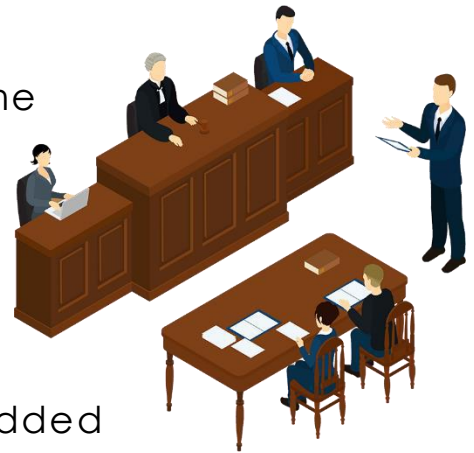
“Do all three branches make the laws, and how do they decide on a law if they disagree?” Judy asked.



“Those are great questions,” Charles said, smiling. “It is the job of the legislative branch to make the laws. Congress is part of the legislative branch. They are responsible for writing bills or proposals for laws. They then vote on these bills in order to make them laws.

The executive branch, which includes the President and Vice-President of the United States, can veto a bill, but they cannot make a new law themselves. They are also in charge of making sure the approved laws are enforced.

The judicial branch must judge the laws and make sure they follow the Constitution. Maybe you have heard of the Supreme Court? The Supreme Court and other lower courts are part of the judicial branch,” Charles explained.



“These three branches form what is called a checks and balance system,” added John. “One branch cannot have all of the power. If the legislative branch suggests a bill, and the President does not approve, the executive branch can veto or cancel the bill before it becomes law. Or, if there is a law that goes against the constitution, the judicial branch can rule against it. Each branch works together to keep our country balanced and running smoothly. Does that make sense?”

The three members of the Treehouse Society nodded slowly.

“Well,” Charles said. “Our work here is done. Farewell!”

Judy looked at Ernie and Leo as the door closed behind their two visitors. “If it works for the United States, it should work for us.”

After voting, Ernie became president, part of the executive branch for their club. Leo was appointed to represent the legislative branch, and Judy was selected for the judicial branch.

Their first item of business was the vegetable law. Congressman Leo proposed the rule that only one vegetable, any vegetable of choice, could be served at a meeting. Judge Judy decided that this rule was consistent with the Treehouse Society’s constitution. President Ernie didn’t veto the law and agreed to inspect all future picnic baskets to ensure they complied with the rule.

The Treehouse Society went on to become a model for Treehouse clubs all over the world.



The Tree Branches of the Treehouse

Society (exercises)

Will you help the Treehouse Society set up their club?

Part 1. Move each job from the list under the correct branch that does that job.

Jobs	Ernie Executive Branch	Leo Legislative Branch	Judy Judicial Branch
Judge whether a law follows the constitution.			
Propose laws by writing bills.			
Vote on bills.			
Execute the laws or put them into action.			
Veto a law that they disagree with.			
Rule against a law through a court decision.			

Part 2. This is the official constitution for the Treehouse Club. Use words from the word bank to fill in the blanks.

Word Bank

judge executive government
veto power legislative

We, the kids of the Treehouse club, in order to form a more perfect club, have decided to form three branches of _____ for our club. The _____ branch will include the president and will be able to _____ any laws they don't approve of. The _____ branch will make laws that are fair and just for everyone. The judicial branch will _____ whether or not these laws are fair. All members of the club will have a voice and equal _____ and responsibilities in running our club.

Part 3. Imagine you were part of Congress. What laws would you want to make?

The Tree Branches of the Treehouse Society (answers)

Part 1. Move each job from the list under the correct branch that does that job.

Jobs	Ernie Executive Branch	Leo Legislative Branch	Judy Judicial Branch
Judge whether a law follows the constitution.			Judge whether a law follows the constitution.
Propose laws by writing bills.		Propose laws by writing bills.	
Vote on bills.		Vote on bills.	
Execute the laws or put them into action.	Execute the laws or put them into action.		
Veto a law that they disagree with.	Veto a law that they disagree with.		
Rule against a law through a court decision.			Rule against a law through a court decision.

Part 2. This is the official constitution for the Treehouse Club. Use words from the word bank to fill in the blanks.

We, the kids of the Treehouse club, in order to form a more perfect club, have decided to form three branches of government for our club. The executive branch will include the president and will be able to veto any laws it doesn't approve of. The legislative branch will make laws that are fair and just for everyone. The judicial branch will judge whether or not these laws are fair. All members of the club will have a voice and equal power and responsibilities in running our club.

Part 3. Answers will vary.