

The U.S.

Constitution

IN TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

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THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

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NC Standard Course of Study: Social Studies

Goal 1 or 2, kindergarten–third grades:
Identify, Exhibiting and Characterize good
and responsible citizenship.

Goal 4, fourth grade: Analyze social and
political institutions in North Carolina.

Goal 2, fifth grade: Analyze social and
political institutions in North America.

Goals 7 and 9, sixth and seventh grades:
Assess connections between historical
events and contemporary issues in South
America, Europe (sixth) and Asia, Africa
and Australia (seventh).

Tenth grade: Civics and Government:
Example legal and political systems;
examine founding documents; concentrate
on cause/effect relationships and multiple
causation.

The activities also address goals in
Information Skills and English/ Language
Arts dealing with strategies for reading,
accessing a variety of sources, applying
decision making and planning and reading
and analyzing informational text.

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A WAY of LIFE



DIRECTIONS: Use photos and other text from newspapers to complete the following:

I can choose...	Liberty is...	Happiness is...	Pursuit of happiness means...	
I agree...	I disagree...	A leader...	I would vote for...	Yes, I believe...
A rule worth keeping is....	I propose a law...	One solution is...	Good decisions accomplish...	

FOLLOW-UP: What do the answers tell you about the American way of life? What is available in the U.S. that may not be available to citizens of other countries?

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PREAMBLE



"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

DIRECTIONS. Find articles or headlines that illustrate ways the government acts to secure the following:

	Government actions	Date/Page
Form a more perfect union		
Establish justice		
Insure domestic tranquility		
Provide for the common defense		
Promote the general welfare		
Secure the blessings of liberty		

FOLLOW-UP: Define or explain each of the words and phrases. Include your examples in the explanations and/ or choose examples from history.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER DEMOCRACY in PRACTICE



BACKGROUND: Citizens share power in a democracy. In other systems of government, leadership is hereditary or based on political affiliations, class or other factors.

When citizens vote on an issue, that is direct democracy. For example, open town meetings allow all registered voters to consider and vote on issues.

If citizens choose elected officials who vote on their behalf, that system is known as a republic or indirect democracy. Elected officials or representatives make most decisions affecting citizens in the United States.

In schools, students may vote on some issues while representatives on the student council make other decisions.

DIRECTIONS: Look through the newspaper and find examples of direct or pure democracy and indirect democracy or decisions made by representatives.

Direct	
Indirect	

FOLLOW-UP: Read stories about other countries, and look for descriptions that indicate whether the leaders are elected or chosen by other means. With stickers or other labels, mark the countries on a map that choose leaders through elections and those chosen by other means.

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WHY the CONSTITUTION?



DIRECTIONS: Constitutions exist to establish and enforce rules or laws, so that members of the community, state or nation can more easily settle differences.

Using your newspaper, identify ways that laws help individuals and organizations settle their differences.

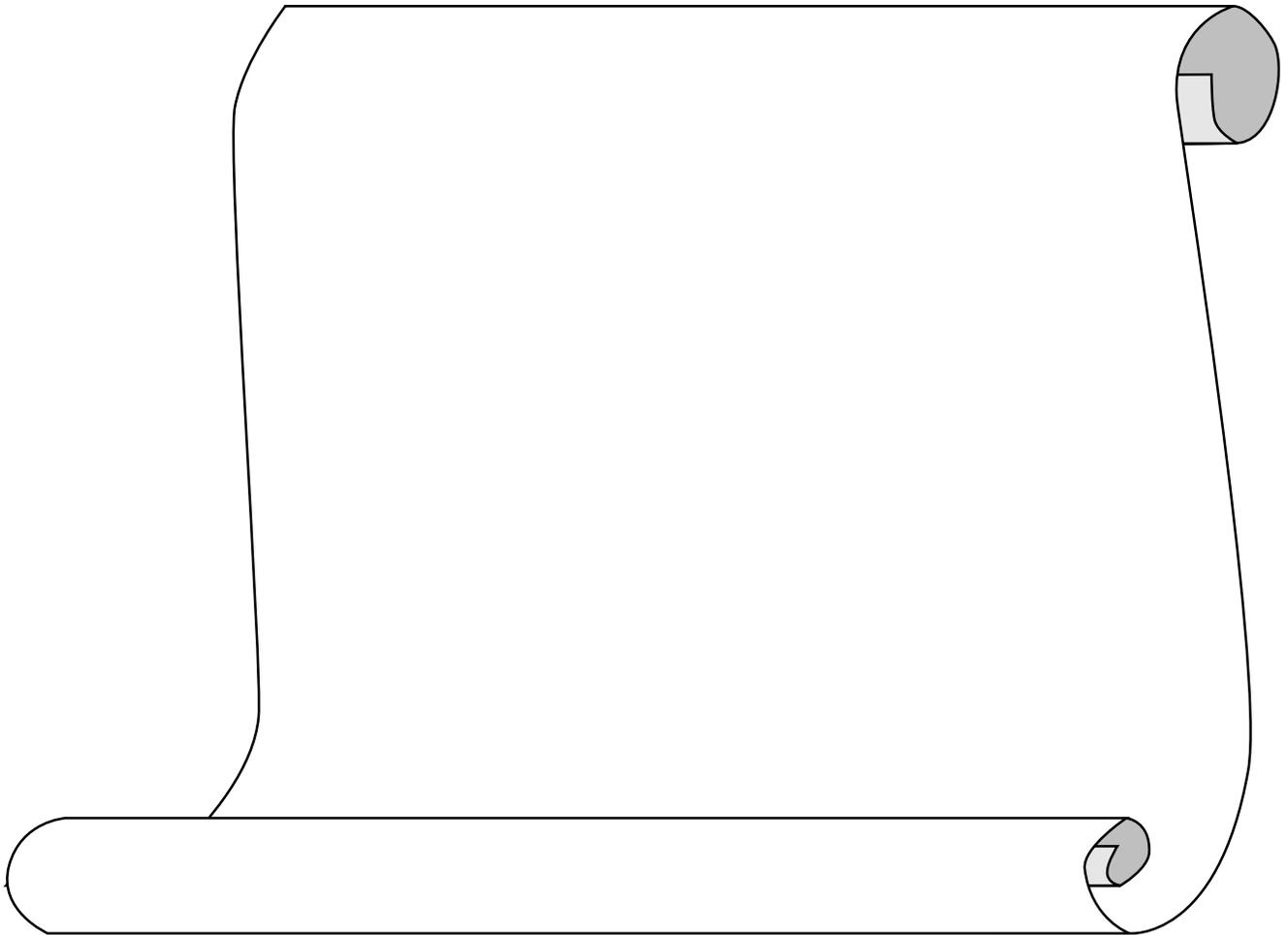
EXAMPLE ONE:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is the disagreement?2. What law applied?3. What might happen without the law?
EXAMPLE TWO:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is the disagreement?2. What law applied?3. What might happen without the law?
EXAMPLE THREE:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is the disagreement?2. What law applied?3. What might happen without the law?

FOLLOW-UP: Write a set of rules or “constitution” for your classroom. What freedoms and responsibilities do individuals have? What powers do the leaders or teachers need to maintain a productive classroom? What appeals do the students have if they feel they have been treated unfairly? What do fairness and justice mean in a classroom setting?

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS



DIRECTIONS: The Framers took ideas from the past to build the founding documents for the United States. Ideas came from historical documents, such as the Magna Carta and the Mayflower Compact. Search newspapers for stories about the establishment of governments in other countries. What factors are affecting the decisions? Is the U.S. Constitution influencing the constitutions in other countries? If so, how?



FOLLOW-UP: Conduct research to find out how historical documents influenced the Constitution. To read the documents, visit the following Web sites:

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/explore/FoundingDocuments/index.shtml>

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/help/constRedir.html>.

To evaluate your research, use the rubric written by a teacher in her explanation of rubrics at www.paec.org/teacher2teacher/bldgteacherleaders_presentation.ppt. (accessed August 10, 2005)

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ONE NATION, MANY STATES



DIRECTIONS: The United States has one national constitution and 50 state constitutions. Identify stories that tell what the constitutions allow the federal and state governments to do.

Federal	State

FOLLOW-UP: To understand better the differences between the federal and state constitutions, read through the two documents, located at www.ourdocuments.gov and <http://statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/nc/stgovt/preconst.htm>.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER NATION and WORLD

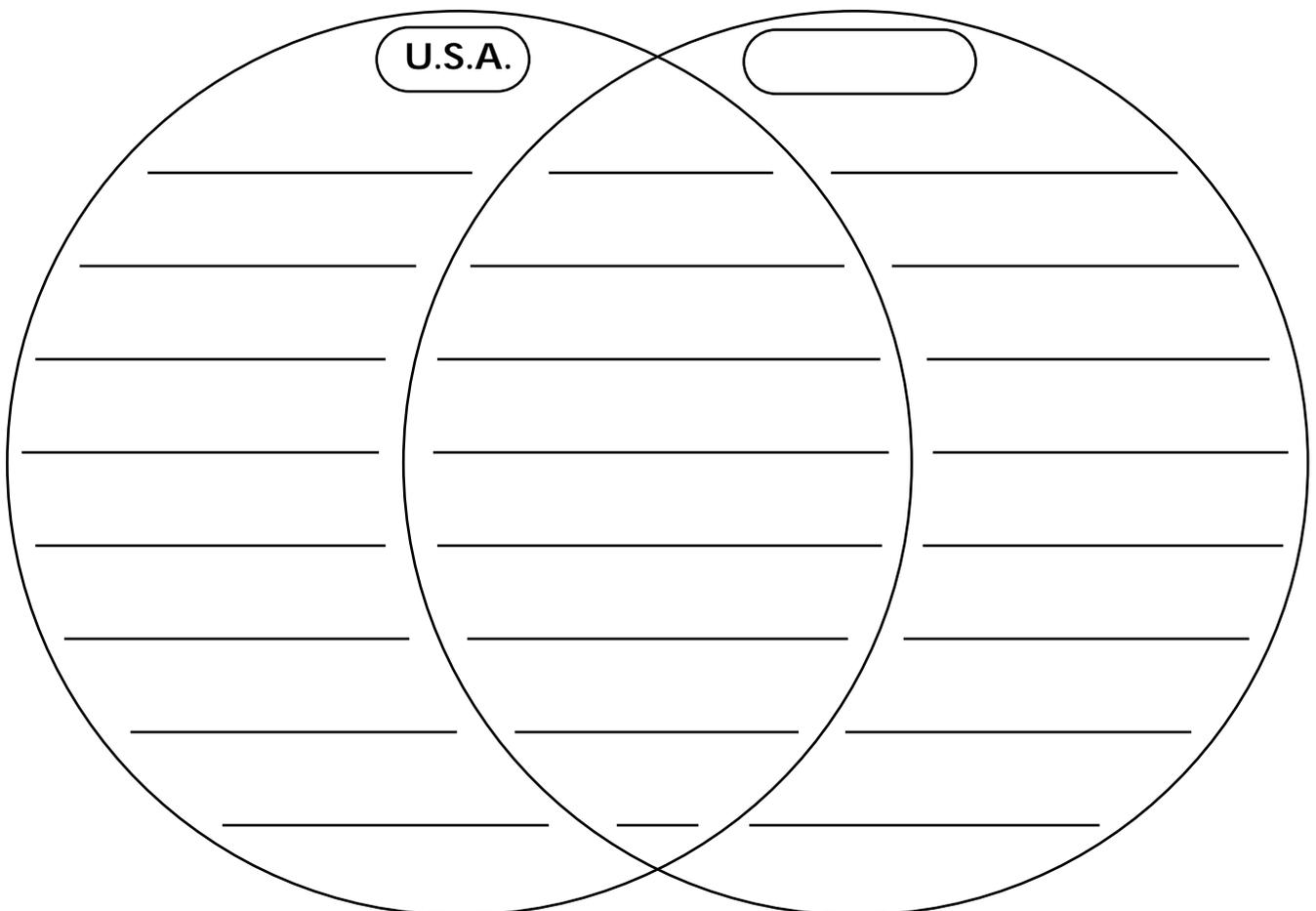


BACKGROUND: The United States Constitution is the oldest written constitution in the world.

Nearly every nation has a written constitution.

Many countries are now governed by constitutions, drafted since 1970. Countries, such as Great Britain and Israel, have unwritten constitutions consisting of legislative acts, court decisions and customs never recorded in single documents but still regarded as constitutions.

DIRECTIONS: Read news about other countries and their constitutions. From the stories determine how those constitutions and the U.S. Constitution are alike and different. Use the Venn diagram below to show similarities and differences between the U.S. Constitution and the constitution of another country.



FOLLOW-UP: Identify stories that tell about the difficulties other countries face in their efforts to adopt constitutions and execute laws.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

BILL of RIGHTS



DIRECTIONS: Use the newspaper to find examples of the rights and protections specified in the Bill of Rights:

1. Freedom of Speech
2. Right to keep and bear arms
3. Protection against soldiers' being quartered in private homes during peace times
4. Right against unreasonable search and seizure
5. Protection against self-incrimination and double jeopardy
6. Right to counsel and a speedy trial
7. Right to trial by jury
8. Protection against excessive bail and fines and against cruel and unusual punishment

FOLLOW-UP: Originally, the Bill of Rights held 12 amendments. The first two dealt with congressional pay and representation and failed to pass. The last two, accepted as part of the Bill of Rights, concerned the rights retained by individuals and states. The First Amendment provides for freedom of religion and press and the right to assemble peacefully and petition the government, in addition to freedom of speech, the right singled out above.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

FIRST AMENDMENT



DIRECTIONS: In newspapers, find examples of citizens exercising the freedoms guaranteed in the First Amendment, namely freedom of religion, speech and press and the right to assemble peacefully and petition the government for redress of grievances.

Describe the actions, and include page numbers and the names of the newspapers where you find the information. Display the stories, photos, cartoons and other features you find in your classroom.

Religion

Speech

Press

Assembly

Petition

FOLLOW-UP: On bulletin boards or the walls of your classroom, organize and display the stories, photos, editorial cartoons and other features you find in your newspaper. To continue learning about the function of the Bill or Rights today, add to the display throughout the year.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in the NEWS



DIRECTIONS: Find as many of the following items as you can in today's newspaper. Number them in your newspaper and/ or write the answer and page number where you found the information.

Pages

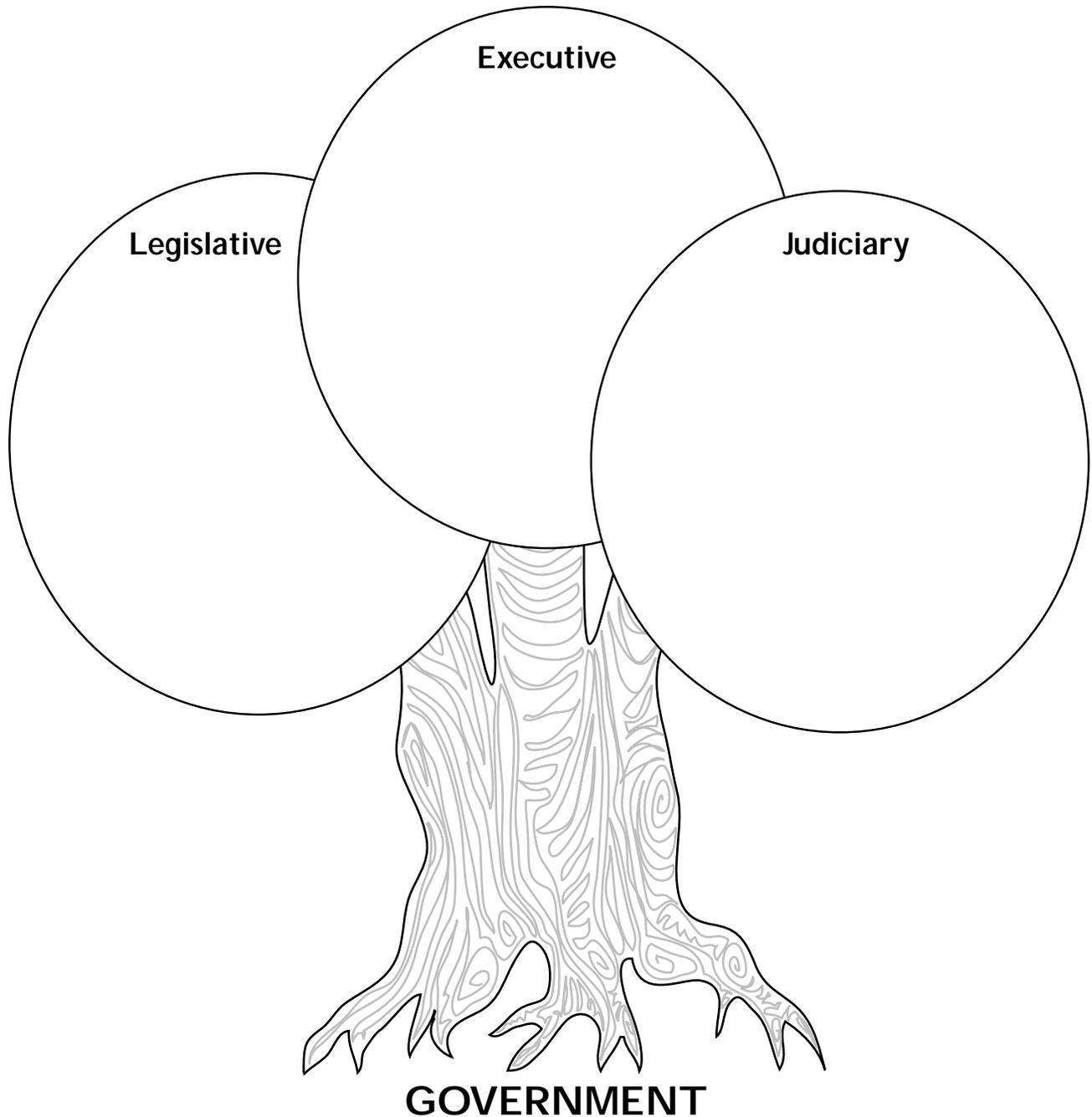
- _____ 1. An action taken by the U.S. congressman representing your district
- _____ 2. A reference to one of North Carolina's U.S. senators (and senators from other states)
- _____ 3. The name of someone who works for the executive branch of the U.S. government
- _____ 4. The name of a Supreme Court justice or a judge serving in a lower federal court
- _____ 5. An example of Congress exercising its powers
- _____ 6. An example of the President exercising his powers
- _____ 7. An example of one of the federal courts acting on its authority
- _____ 8. A reference to a jury trial
- _____ 9. An article relating to freedom of press
- _____ 10. A citizen exercising freedom of speech or religion
- _____ 11. A reference to the U.S. election process
- _____ 12. An editorial cartoon or other commentary about a constitutional issue

FOLLOW-UP: Choose an interesting and important newspaper story and read it carefully. With other students, read aloud the most significant parts of the story. Discuss how it relates to the U.S. Constitution.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS



DIRECTIONS: From newspapers, identify and then list officials from the three branches of government on the tree drawn below:



FOLLOW-UP: Highlight the names of ELECTED officials, and underline the names of officials who are APPOINTED.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER BRANCHES of GOVERNMENT



DIRECTIONS: Identify stories that involve the branches of the federal government. List the powers exercised and the specific institution involved in the action by the appropriate branch of government.

	Powers	Institution (agency, commission, committee etc.)
Executive		
Legislative		
Judiciary		

FOLLOW-UP: How do decisions made at the federal level affect your life and the lives of others in your community? Conduct interviews and discussions to find out what others think will happen locally as a result of federal action.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

CHECKS and BALANCES



BACKGROUND: The Framers of the Constitution separated the branches of government and gave each some authority over the other. Congress enacts laws, but the president can veto them. The Supreme Court can declare laws unconstitutional. The President appoints the justices of the Supreme Court; the U.S. Senate approves the appointments. The president executes the laws, but Congress approves the funding. The U.S. House and Senate must agree on a budget.

DIRECTIONS: In newspapers, find examples of the system of checks and balances at work:

U.S. Senate vs. House of Representatives

Legislative vs. Executive

Courts vs. Executive

Courts vs. Legislative

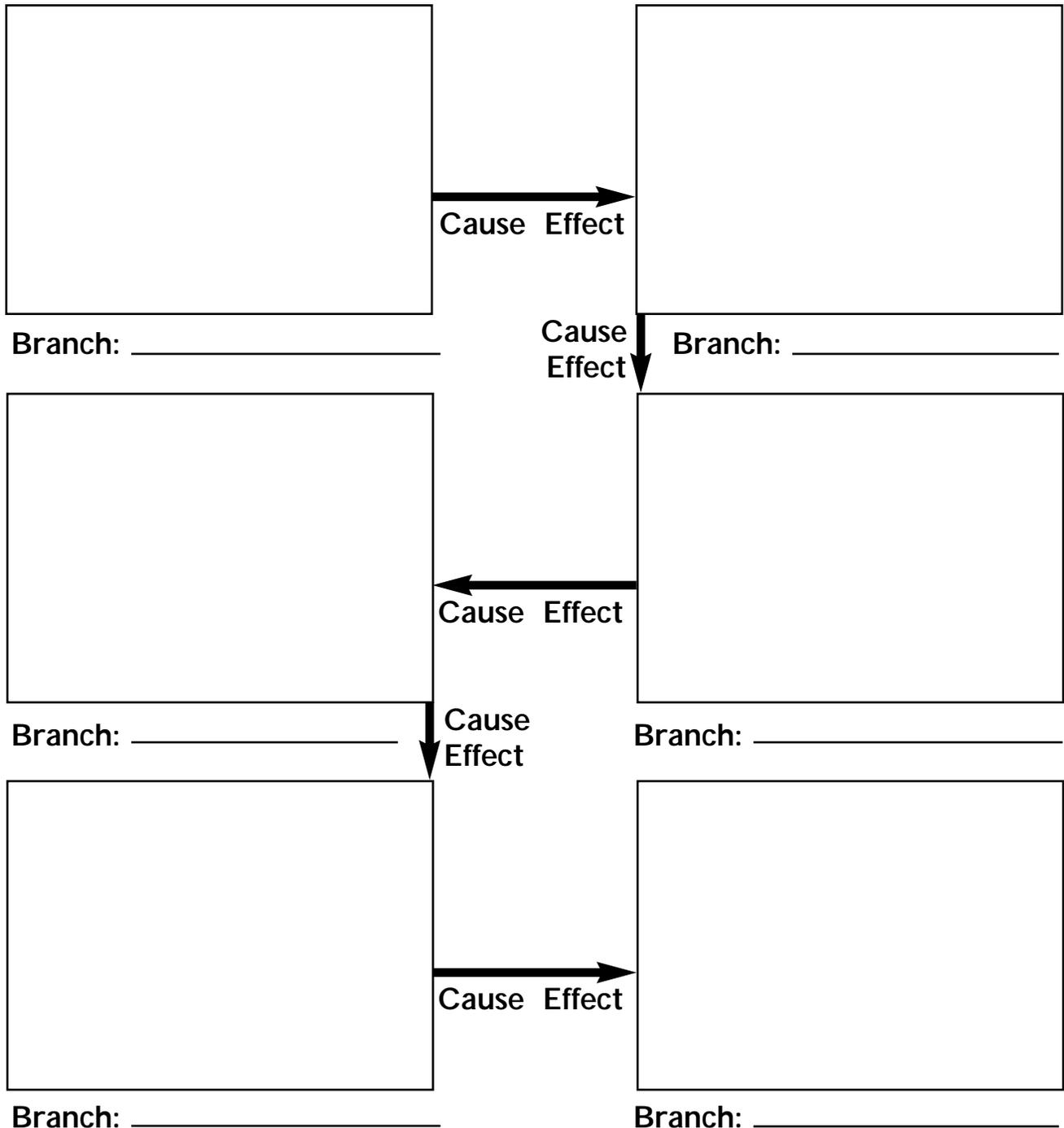
FOLLOW-UP: Given the difficulties you read about, why do you think the Framers of the Constitution instituted a system of checks and balances? From your reading, do you think that one branch of government is exerting more power and influence than the other two?

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CAUSE and EFFECT



DIRECTIONS: Show the actions of the different branches of government and their effects on each. Draw information from stories in newspapers over several days and weeks. Name the branch of government or individuals from that branch, the action taken and follow that by describing the action taken by another branch of government in response.



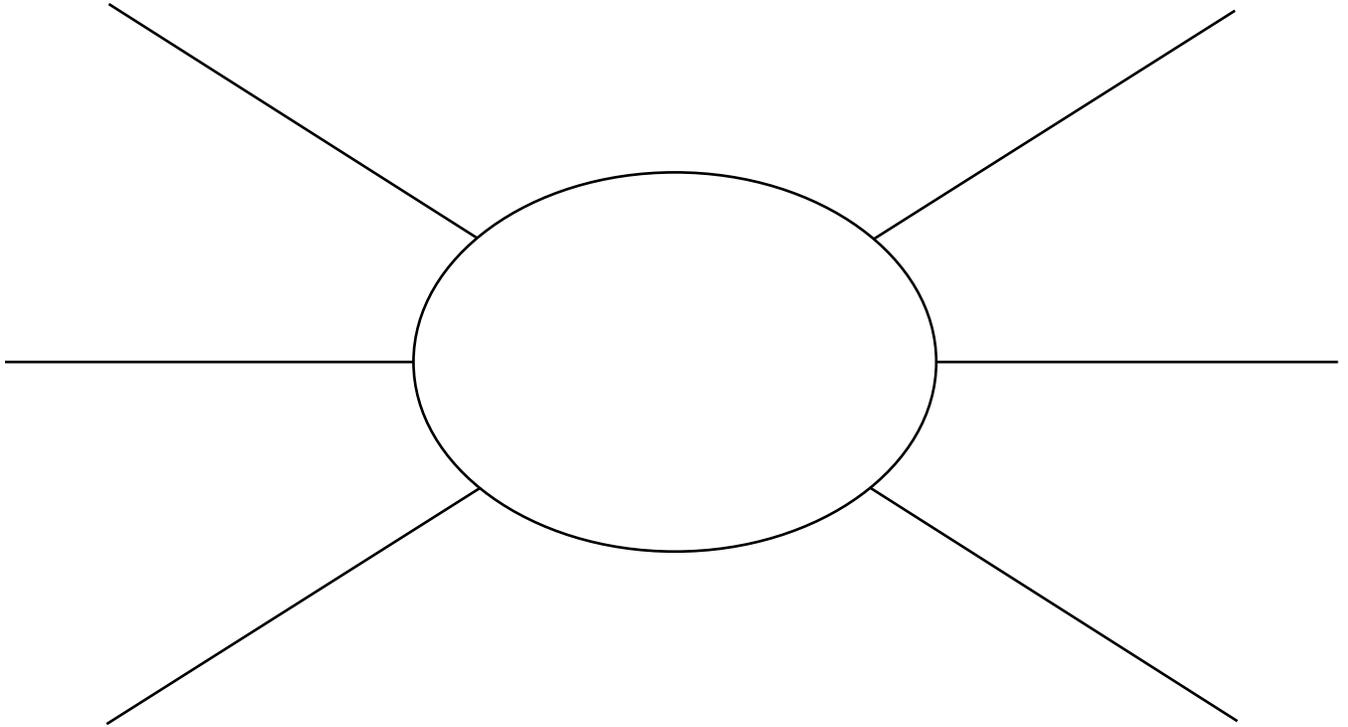
FOLLOW-UP: Cite the part of the U.S. Constitution that explains the process you see at work.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

MANY CAUSES



DIRECTIONS: What led to the decision? What caused the problem? What led up to the event? Analyze what happened in one situation reported in the newspaper and identify the many causes.



FOLLOW-UP: Is one factor more important in explaining why?

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

HOW a BILL BECOMES LAW



BACKGROUND: Check out Web sites that explain how a bill becomes law:
http://www.vote-smart.org/resource_govt101_02.php (Project Vote Smart describes how a bill becomes law.)

<http://www.asheboro.k12.nc.us/ahs/bill.htm> (A high school teacher in Asheboro, NC offers a lesson on how bills become law.)

<http://clerkkids.house.gov/laws/> (The Clerk of the House of Representatives presents a step by step explanation for young people.)

DIRECTIONS: In newspapers, identify bills making their way through Congress. Using the explanations of how a bill becomes law, determine where the proposed bill is, in the legislative process.

Bill

To become law, the bill must...

FOLLOW-UP: According to media reports, what stands in the way of the bill becoming law?

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ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP



DIRECTIONS: Read through the Articles and Amendments that make up the U.S. Constitution. Identify the sections that citizens to take part in the decision-making process. Identify the sections that ensure participation by citizens of diverse backgrounds.

In your newspapers, identify individuals working at the national, state and local level to affect change.

National	State	Local

FOLLOW-UP: Are the individuals who are involved elected leaders or regular citizens? Do they represent diverse cultural backgrounds? Many Causes

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ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES



1. Collect photos and stories about one government official. Also, look in political cartoons for caricatures. Assume different roles: Make a speech that your official is likely to give. If you were a reporter at a press conference, what would you ask this official? Write a letter to the editor, an editorial or create a political cartoon in which you offer an opinion you hold about the official.
2. How does censorship affect a newspaper? To find out, discuss how the newspaper would be if you eliminated all news and commentary that questioned the government decisions? To find out, cut out or draw an "X" through any article in the newspaper that is critical of the government.
3. Read Article 1 of the Constitution and find out how many U.S. senators are called for. From the newspaper, collect the names and photographs of senators. What state does each represent? What is his/her political party? Why is each in the newspaper?
4. Write a job description for the president, senators, representative and judges who work for the federal government. Create help wanted ads that explain the qualifications for holding the different jobs.
5. In newspaper stories, find examples of the president carrying out different duties, such as, chief of state, commander in chief, leader of political party, chief policy maker, chief executive or administrator and world leader or diplomat.
6. Follow a case through the court system. Is it a civil or criminal case? Identify the officers of the court, the lawyers and the plaintiffs and/or defendants in the trial. Write down what you learn in a log or save all of the articles about the trial. Predict the outcome or get more involved by conducting a simulation assigning roles to different students in your classroom and using the facts presented in the trial.
7. Read the 19th, 23rd and 26th amendments to the Constitution. If you were an editorial writer of the day, what arguments might you offer for or against the amendments? Write editorials based on your research.
8. Relate editorial cartoons to the Constitution. For example, identify cartoons that deal with the First Amendment or other amendments that are part of the Bill of Rights, actions taken by the executive, legislative or judicial branches of government.

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ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES, continued



9. Use newspaper stories to explain concepts such as judicial review and the systems of checks and balances.
10. Debate a constitutional question, such as the following: Should the Senate approve the presidential nominee? Should the legislator vote for a measure? Should the president veto the bill? Gather the facts and consider all sides before debating the issue.
11. Do reports in newspapers prove the following quotes to be true? Explain.

"Our Constitution is so simple and practical that it is possible always to meet extraordinary needs by changes in emphasis and arrangement without loss of essential form." (Franklin Roosevelt, President, 1933-1945)

"The U.S. Constitution provided for a government of laws, not of men." (Oliver Wendell Holmes, Associate Justice, U.S. Supreme Court, 1902-1932)

"There can be no question that our Constitution has proved lasting because of its simplicity. It is a cornerstone and not a complete building; or rather, to return to the old figure, it is a root, not a perfect vine." (Woodrow Wilson, President, 1913-1921)

"I do not believe also in the abolition of free inquiry or that the ideas represented by 'freedom of thought,' 'freedom of speech,' 'freedom of press' and 'free assembly' are just rhetorical myths. I believe rather that they are among the most valuable realities that men have gained and that if they are destroyed, men will again fight to have them." (Thomas Wolfe, 20th century American author)

"The fact that a given law or procedure is efficient, convenient and useful in facilitating functions of government, standing alone, will not save it if it is contrary to the Constitution. Convenience and efficiency are not the primary objectives—or the hallmarks—of a democratic government." (Warren Burger, Chief Justice of the United States, 1969-1986)

12. Search newspapers and conduct other research to identify a problem or issue that affects you. Draft a law that addresses the problem. Work with others in your class to determine the best measures to take to address the problem and develop the best law that you can. Discuss the costs and benefits or the pros and cons of the action you've proposed. Determine if existing or proposed laws seek to address the problem. Write a legislator or other government official about your proposals.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION in TODAY'S NEWSPAPER SOURCES for QUOTES and IDEAS



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hoffner, Sara E.H. and Tom DiFiglio. *You and Your Government*. Palm Beach Newspapers, Inc. West Palm Beach, Florida, 1983.

Morse, Julie. *Newspaper to Teach About the Constitution*. ANPA Foundation, 1987.

OTHER SOURCES

www.ncpress.com

Links to N.C. newspapers published online

www.naa.org

www.naafoundation.org

Links to national and some international newspapers published online

www.teachfirstamendment.org

Why and how to teach about and act on the First Amendment

www.crfc.org/americanjury/index.html

Explanation of the American jury system and its role in American legal, social and political life

www.civiced.org/index.php

Lessons for Constitution and Citizenship Day