

Summary: United States Government

Government by the People

One role of our government is to protect our rights. The United States government is “by the people.” This means that the people create the government and decide who will lead them. Our government is “of the people.” This means that each citizen has a say in the government. Our government is “for the people” because it is for the good of everyone.

The United States is a democracy. The people decide who will lead and what the government will do. But there are too many people to vote on every decision. So people choose representatives, who vote for them in the government. Representatives make decisions and represent the people. Citizens vote for representatives in an election.

Before 1776, the states were colonies ruled by Great Britain. People in the colonies wanted to be free from British rule. They wrote the Declaration of Independence to explain why they wanted to break ties with Britain.

The Constitution

The leaders of the United States wrote the Constitution in 1787. The Bill of Rights is part of the Constitution. It protects our rights and freedoms. It makes sure all citizens have freedom, equality, and justice. The Bill of Rights also limits the powers of the government.

The Constitution set up three branches of government. This helps make sure that one branch does not get too powerful. The legislative branch makes laws. Citizens elect representatives to Congress. Congress has two parts, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The executive branch carries out the laws. The President is head of the executive branch. The judicial branch decides questions about the laws. This branch includes the courts. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the United States. It has the final say on laws. The Supreme Court decides what laws mean and if they are allowed by the Constitution.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

citizen *noun*, a person born in a country or who promises to be loyal to the country

democracy *noun*, a system in which the people hold the power of government

representative *noun*, a person who acts for a group of people

election *noun*, the way voters choose people to serve in government

constitution *noun*, a plan for setting up and running a government

After You Read

REVIEW What is the job of representatives in our democratic system?

Underline the words that tell what representatives do for the people who elect them.

REVIEW Why are there three branches of government? The Constitution set up three branches of government. Why? Draw a box around the sentence that tells the answer.