



*Constitutional Principles and  
Structures: SS.7.CG.1.9*  
**Limits on Government Power**  
**READING #2**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**SS.7.CG.1.9 Benchmark Clarification 2:** Students will describe and distinguish between separation of powers and checks and balances.

**This material is adapted from resources developed by the Center for Civic Education.**

The writers of the U.S. Constitution, known as the Framers, protected Americans against the government's abuse of power. The Framers divided the federal government into three branches to set limits on power. This **separation of powers** sets up three branches with their own powers and responsibilities. Influenced by French Enlightenment thinker Charles Montesquieu, the Framers believed that each branch would have different tasks to protect the people's liberty. This separation of powers would limit any branch's ability to get too much power.

This system was set up to limit the authority of the government. However, the Framers still feared that one branch of government could have more power than the other two. They established **checks and balances** to ensure that none of the three branches would become too powerful. The principle of checks and balances allows each branch of government to limit the power of the other branches.

**checks and balances** - a principle of the federal government, according to the U.S. Constitution, that allows each branch of government to limit the power of the other branches

**separation of powers** - the structure of the federal government, according to the U.S. Constitution, that sets up three branches with their own distinct powers and responsibilities

**Source**

Quigley, C., & Rodriguez, K. *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*. Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education, 2007. Print.