



Florida State and Local
Government: SS.7.CG.3.12
Comparing Constitutions
READING #1

Name: _____

Date: _____



SS.7.CG.3.12 Benchmark Clarification 1: Students will identify the purposes of a constitution (e.g., provides a framework for government, limits government authority, protects individual rights of the people).

A constitution is a written plan for a government. In a constitution, the powers and responsibilities of government are listed, the powers of the government are limited in certain ways, and the rights of the people are protected.

The U.S. Constitution provides a framework (outline) for how the government will work. In the United States, the Constitution creates three branches of government – **legislative**, **executive**, and **judicial** – and defines each branch's powers, responsibilities, and roles.

The Constitution outlines the limits on the powers of these three branches by creating a system of **checks and balances**. This system guarantees that no one branch of government can become more powerful than the other branches. Here is an example of checks and balances: **Congress** makes a law, the **president** may decide to **veto** the law, and the **U.S. Supreme Court** may determine that the law, if overturned by Congress so that it becomes law, is **unconstitutional**.

The Constitution also protects the rights of the people. The **Bill of Rights** was added to the Constitution to list the rights of the people and explain the limits on the power of the government. For example, the Third Amendment says that the government cannot make people quarter soldiers (give soldiers a place to stay in their homes) in times of peace

Bill of Rights - the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution

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

Congress - the national legislative body of the U.S., consisting of the Senate, or upper house, and the House of Representatives, or lower house

executive branch - the branch of government that enforces the laws made by the legislative branch

judicial branch - the branch of government that interprets the laws made by the legislative branch

legislative branch - the branch of government that creates laws

president - the head of the executive branch

unconstitutional - not in agreement with the U.S Constitution

U.S. Supreme Court - the highest court of the United States; it sits at the top of the federal court system

veto - a decision by an executive authority such as a president or governor to reject a law passed by the legislative branch