

2026 MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guide

Grade 8 Civics

Question 11: Constructed-Response

Reporting Category: Government Structures

Practice Category: Explanations and Reasoning

Standard: [8.T3.2](#) - Examine the interrelationship of the three branches (the checks and balance system).

- Congress: enumerated powers, general powers, limits on power, checks on other two branches; roles of political parties in the organization of Congress; roles within the legislative branch, such as the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, minority party leaders; the system for accomplishing legislation, including committees, hearings and legislative procedures
- the Presidency: roles, powers and limits, checks on other two branches, role of the Cabinet, such as the Vice President, Attorney General and Secretaries of State, Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security; executive departments and agencies (such as the Department of Education, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or the Food and Drug Administration), and branches of the military
- the Supreme Court: role and powers, checks on other two branches, lower courts

Item Description: Analyze an historical example to describe interactions between the three branches of the U.S. government and explain checks on executive and judicial power.

This item can be found in the released item sets on the [MCAS Resource Center](#).

Scoring Guide

Select a score point in the table below to view the sample student response.

Score*	Description
4A 4B	The response demonstrates a thorough understanding of the interrelationship of the three branches of government. The response correctly identifies the branch of government that President Roosevelt thought had too much power and clearly explains his position using evidence from sources. The response correctly determines whether President Roosevelt tipped the balance of power and clearly explains the reasoning. The response also clearly describes a way that a president can check the power of that branch of government.
3	The response demonstrates a general understanding of the interrelationship of the three branches of government.
2	The response demonstrates a limited understanding of the interrelationship of the three branches of government.
1	The response demonstrates a partial understanding of the interrelationship of the three branches of government.
0	The response is incorrect or contains some correct work that is irrelevant to the skill or concept being measured.

*Letters are used to distinguish between sample student responses that earned the same score (e.g., 4A and 4B).

The following source describes some events that took place when Franklin D. Roosevelt was president.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was president of the United States from 1933–1945. The following photograph shows President Roosevelt giving a speech on the radio.



Courtesy of Library of Congress

In 1933, the law known as the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) was passed, which allowed President Roosevelt to decide how much American workers would be paid at private companies. Many business owners thought the law was unfair and that the federal government had too much power. They challenged the law in the court system. In 1935, the Supreme Court ruled that the law was unconstitutional.

After the Supreme Court declared NIRA unconstitutional, President Roosevelt stated, "During the past half century the balance of power between the three great branches of the federal government has been tipped out of balance. . . ." To help restore the balance of power, President Roosevelt proposed a law to increase the number of justices on the Supreme Court. This new law would have allowed the appointment of a new Supreme Court justice for every justice that was more than 70 years old. The proposed law was rejected by Congress.

Score Point 4A

This question has four parts.

Part A

Select from the drop-down menu to correctly complete the sentence.

The part of government that President Roosevelt thought had too much power was the

judicial branch. ▼

Part B

Explain why President Roosevelt thought the part of government you identified in Part A had too much power. Use evidence from the source to support your answer.

President Roosevelt thought that the part of government that had too much power is the judicial branch because he proposed a way to restore the balance of power only after the Supreme Court declared the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) unconstitutional. He stated after the Supreme Court declared NIRA to be unconstitutional, "During the past half century the balance of power between the three great branches of the federal government has been tipped out of balance..." This quote shows that he thinks that the judicial branch has way too much power because if a president before him thought the power of each of the branches to be unbalanced, then they would have taken action on that earlier. This shows that President Roosevelt thought that the judicial branch of government had too much power.

Part C

Determine whether President Roosevelt was able to tip the balance of power. Explain your reasoning using information from the source.

President Roosevelt wasn't able to tip the balance of power because the law he proposed stating that there should be an increase in the number of justices in the Supreme Court and allowing the appointment of a new Supreme Court justice for every justice that was more than 70 years old. He thought that 9 justices in the Supreme Court would cause a lot of overlap in opinions that they may share about a certain topic and wouldn't give a lot of variety in opinions. By adding more justices in the Supreme Court, he thought it would give a difference of opinions in the Supreme Court and the power that each of the justices had would be more spread out. This proposed law was rejected by Congress, so his law couldn't be put in place in the government of the United States.

Part D

Using your knowledge of civics, describe one way that a president can check the power of the part of government you identified in Part A.

One way that the president can check the power of the judicial branch is by appointing chief justices that he or she thinks would be appropriate for the job. If a candidate isn't worthy enough for the job, he or she wouldn't appoint them as one of the nine Supreme Court Justices. To become a Supreme Court justice, the candidate had to be appointed by the president and approved by the Senate. This is how the president could check the power of the judicial branch of the federal government.

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Score Point 4B

This question has four parts.

Part A

Select from the drop-down menu to correctly complete the sentence.

The part of government that President Roosevelt thought had too much power was the

judicial branch.

Part B

Explain why President Roosevelt thought the part of government you identified in Part A had too much power. Use evidence from the source to support your answer.

president Roosevelt thought the judicial branch had too much power because they could decide if things were unconstitutional and single handedly get rid of the law, he thought this because one of the laws that he passed was decided unconstitutional by the supreme court and was not a law anymore.

Part C

Determine whether President Roosevelt was able to tip the balance of power. Explain your reasoning using information from the source.

president roosevelt was not able to tip the balance of powers because the law he proposed was rejected by congress. he proposed that there would be 1 more judge added for all of the judges over 70.

Part D

Using your knowledge of civics, describe one way that a president can check the power of the part of government you identified in Part A.

one way the president can check the power of the judicial branch is when there needs to be a new justice, the president appoints them.

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Score Point 3

This question has four parts.

Part A

Select from the drop-down menu to correctly complete the sentence.

The part of government that President Roosevelt thought had too much power was the

judicial branch. ▼

Part B

Explain why President Roosevelt thought the part of government you identified in Part A had too much power. Use evidence from the source to support your answer.

he thought that because they declared his law, NIRA unconstititutional. the text states, " After the Supreme Court declared NIRA unconstititutional, President Poosevelt stated, ' During the past half century the balance of power between the three great branches of the federal government has been trpped out of banance."

Part C

Determine whether President Roosevelt was able to tip the balance of power. Explain your reasoning using information from the source.

he didn't tip the power because the judicial branch still have the same power just a more diverse answer.

Part D

Using your knowledge of civics, describe one way that a president can check the power of the part of government you identified in Part A.

the presedent can appoint justices which can influence the judicial branch.

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Score Point 2

This question has four parts.

Part A

Select from the drop-down menu to correctly complete the sentence.

The part of government that President Roosevelt thought had too much power was the

Department of Labor. ▼

Part B

Explain why President Roosevelt thought the part of government you identified in Part A had too much power. Use evidence from the source to support your answer.

After the businesses were unhappy with the law, they went to the supreme court to rule that the law was unconstitutional. President Roosevelt was most likely unhappy with this decision that the supreme court made so he decided to try and add more justices on the Supreme Court to try and ensure that the power was balanced.

Part C

Determine whether President Roosevelt was able to tip the balance of power. Explain your reasoning using information from the source.

I think he was unable to tip the balance because the law that he proposed was rejected by congress.

Part D

Using your knowledge of civics, describe one way that a president can check the power of the part of government you identified in Part A.

He can ensure this by trying to equal out the amount of power in just the Department of labor without trying to make other branches more powerful.

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Score Point 1

This question has four parts.

Part A

Select from the drop-down menu to correctly complete the sentence.

The part of government that President Roosevelt thought had too much power was the

House of Representatives ▼

Part B

Explain why President Roosevelt thought the part of government you identified in Part A had too much power. Use evidence from the source to support your answer.

He stated that the federal government had too much power, in that he didn't have enough

Part C

Determine whether President Roosevelt was able to tip the balance of power. Explain your reasoning using information from the source.

He was unable because the law he had proposed was rejected by Congress

Part D

Using your knowledge of civics, describe one way that a president can check the power of the part of government you identified in Part A.

If the President proposes a law, the judicial can decline it.

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Score Point 0

This question has four parts.

Part A

Select from the drop-down menu to correctly complete the sentence.

The part of government that President Roosevelt thought had too much power was the

Department of Labor. ▼

Part B

Explain why President Roosevelt thought the part of government you identified in Part A had too much power. Use evidence from the source to support your answer.

Cause it would target business that how much it would pay the workers

Part C

Determine whether President Roosevelt was able to tip the balance of power. Explain your reasoning using information from the source.

In the source it says "Three great branches of the federal government has been tipped out of balance"

Part D

Using your knowledge of civics, describe one way that a president can check the power of the part of government you identified in Part A.

The president can charge the business and companies to pay the companies the workers more money

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