

Let's Get Started

In this lesson, you will learn how the United States government helps to support United States veterans. First you will learn how the United States government is set up and some of the jobs it performs. Then you will learn who United States veterans are. Lastly, you will learn which specific part of the United States government is responsible for supporting veterans and a few examples of how they do that.

The United States Government

The United States Constitution is the document that sets up the *federal*, or national, government like a tree with three branches - the legislative branch, the executive branch and the judicial branch. The Constitution separates three main powers of government between the three branches.

Congress is the legislative branch and their main power is to make the laws. The President is in charge of the executive branch whose main power is to *enforce*, or carry out, the laws that Congress makes. Lastly, the Supreme Court of the United States is in charge of the judicial branch. The main power of the judicial branch is to *interpret* the law, or to decide on the meaning of the law. In addition to those three main powers of government, the Constitution also lists other responsibilities each branch.



The United States Constitution

Some of those responsibilities are powers given to the legislative and executive branches have regarding the armed services. The Constitution gives the legislative branch the power to raise and support armies, provide and maintain a navy, declare war, and control how much money is spent on armed services projects. The Constitution gives the President, as head of the executive branch, the power of Commander-In-Chief.

United States Veterans

A United States *veteran* is anyone who served the United States as a member in any of the branches of the United States armed services. The armed services are the army, navy, marines, air force and coast guard. Some veterans joined their service during times of war while other veterans joined their service in times of peace. Some veterans served in *combat*, or fighting, while other veterans never served in a fight.

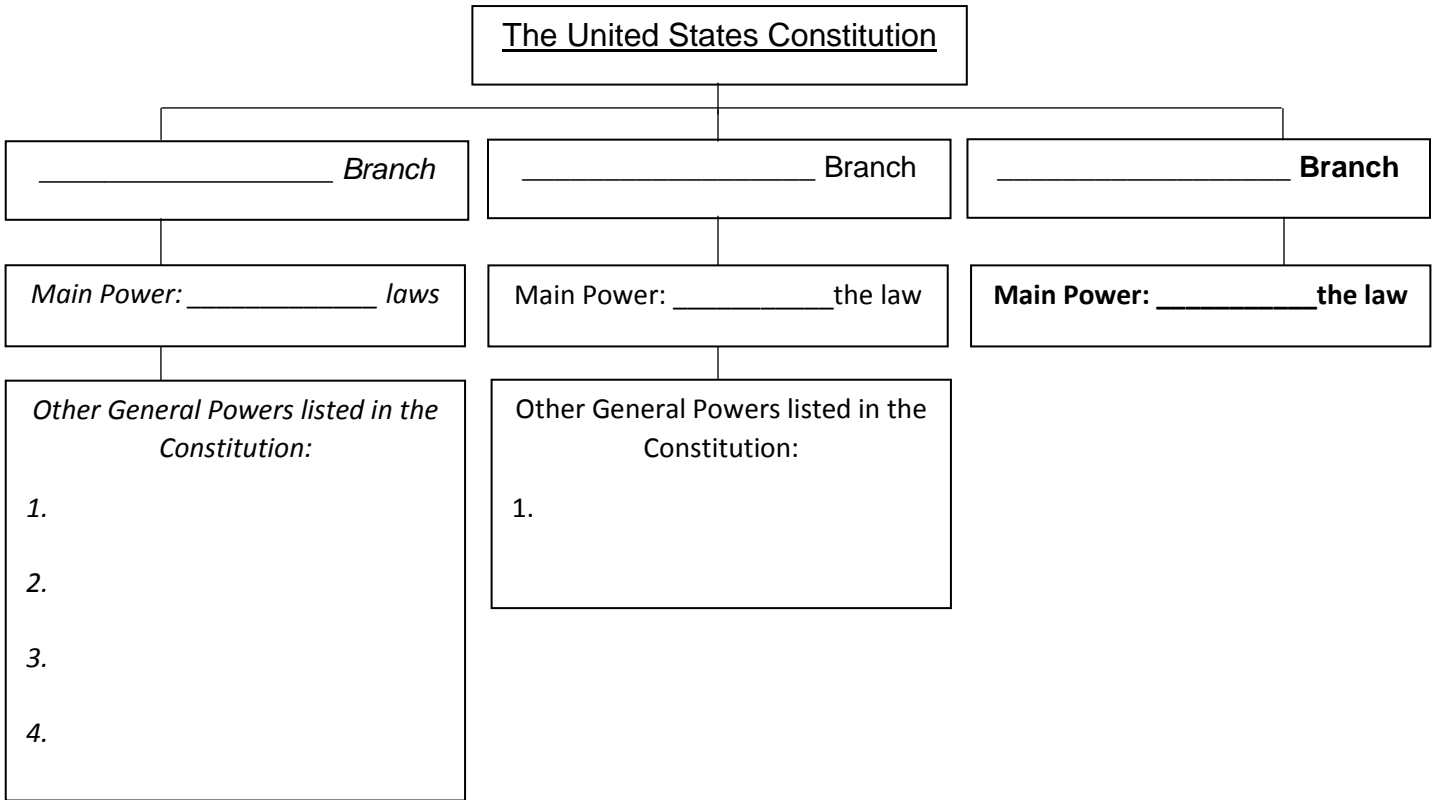
Throughout American History, every veteran has played an important role in defending the United States and its interests. Whether the veteran served 2, 4, 20 or 40 years in their branch of service, the United States government has a responsibility to provide support for them as they leave the armed services and return home to *civilian*, a non-military, life.

Taking Care of U.S. Veterans

Name: _____

The United States Government

Directions: Use the reading to help you fill in the tree map below. Fill in the three branches of government and their powers.



Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. According to the reading, what are the **main** powers of the three branches of government?

2. According to the reading, what does the government do for the armed services?

3. *Make an inference:* What do you guess the government does for people who used to be in the armed services?

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The Department of Veterans Affairs

The Executive Branch has 15 departments and many other agencies that all work together to “enforce the law.” Some of these departments include the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Each department works to create and run programs that act out or carry out the laws that the legislative branch makes.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the second largest department in the Executive Branch. Over 340,000 employees work to carry out federal laws by creating and delivering services and benefits to veterans and their families. The VA’s three main organizations are the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration, and the National Cemetery Administration.



The Department of Veteran Affairs motto. Image courtesy of creative commons.

Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

The Veterans Health Administration serve veterans’ needs as they recover from service related injuries or if they’re sick or injured for non-service related reasons. The VHA works to make sure that veterans have help when they are sick by running the VHA’s Health Benefits Program. VHA is one of the largest health care systems in the world and is important to the whole medical field because of its many training and research programs.

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)

The Veterans Benefits Administration helps to organize and deliver many kinds of financial benefits to servicemembers, veterans and their families. These benefits include compensation and pension services, educational benefits, assistance with post-service employment, and guaranteeing home and business loans.



Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, Florida is one of the 131 national cemeteries managed by the NCA. Image courtesy of UCF VLP.

National Cemetery Administration (NCA)

The Department of Veterans Affairs works to take care of veterans in life and in death. The National Cemetery Administration organizes burial and memorial benefits to honor veterans. Through the NCA, veterans are eligible for a gravesite and burial proceedings in a national cemetery, a government headstone, marker or medallion, a burial flag, and a Presidential Memorial Certificate. The NCA provides these benefits to the veteran and their families at no cost.

Veterans Organizations

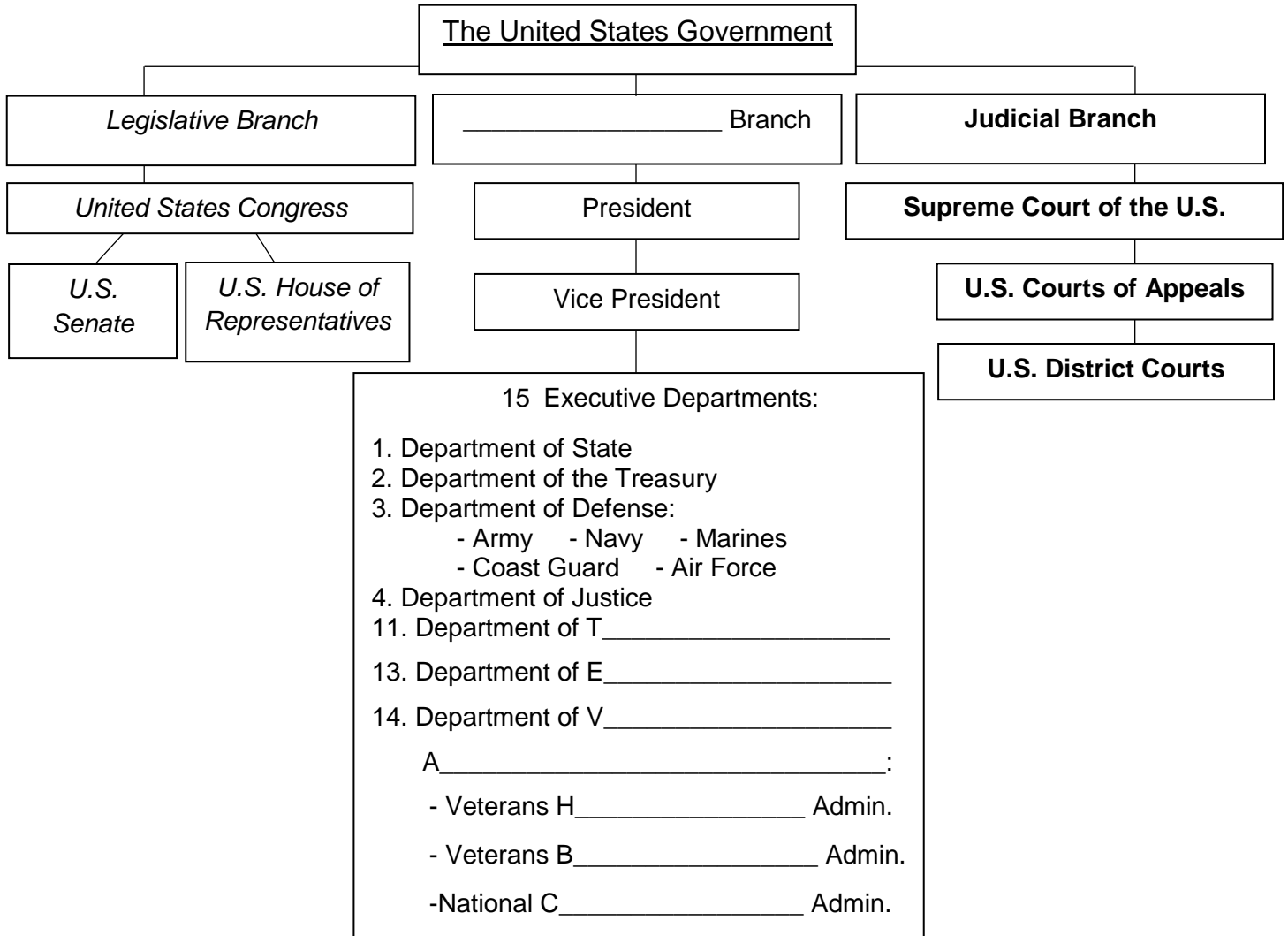
Veterans have government assistance, but they also have each other. Veterans form groups on their own that are **not** a part of any government organizations but that still work to share post-war friendships and to help each other. For example, the Veterans of Foreign War (VFW) was created just before World War I and the American Legion formed after the war. Some organizations were created for specific wars like Vietnam, or Iraq and Afghanistan. Some groups were created for submariners and other specialists. These veterans’ organizations help veterans and they also remind Americans of veterans’ service by participating in patriotic events.

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The Department of Veterans Affairs

Directions: Use the reading to help you fill in the blanks in the tree map below.



Directions: Use the reading and tree maps to help you answer the questions below.

1. What are three examples of what the VA does?

2. *Make an inference.* The VA and the Department of Defense (DOD) are different executive departments. What do you think are the differences between the two departments?

3. *Make an inference.* Why do you think the US created the VA and the DOD as two different departments?

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U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs
National Cemetery
Administration



Department
of History

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The Veterans Health Administration runs medical *facilities*, or hospitals and clinics, that serve veterans' needs as they recover from service related injuries. This includes services to help a veteran's physical body recover like prosthetic services, speech or hearing services, or traumatic brain injury and other trauma services. Other services help veterans recover mentally and emotionally. The VA offers suicide prevention programs, substance abuse and mental health counseling, as well as counseling for post-traumatic stress disorder.

VHA facilities also treat veterans who did not get sick or injured because of their service and need care for other things. Veterans can go to the VA for regular doctor checkups, for help with common cold or for flu vaccinations. They offer nutrition, public health, and wellness services. The VHA works to make sure no one who served the nation is sick and without help.

Another way the VHA works to make sure that veterans have help when they are sick is through the VHA's Health Benefits Program. Veterans are *eligible*, or able to, sign up for health insurance paid for by the government.

VHA is one of the largest health care systems in the world. The VA health care system runs 152 hospitals, 800 community-based outpatient clinics, 126 nursing home care units and 35 *domiciliaries*, or homes for veterans. In all, there are over 1,700 VA medical facilities of some kind that serve about 8.76 million veterans every year.

The VHA is important to the whole medical field because of its training and research programs. The VHA offers training for many of America's doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals. Around 60 percent of all medical students who are training to be doctors get part of their training at VA hospitals. Important medical research done at VA facilities also benefits the United States and the world.



The new Orlando VA Medical Center at Lake Nona is one of 152 medical centers managed by the VHA. The VA Lake Nona Campus is co-located with the University of Central Florida College of Medicine, the Burnham Institute, the University of Florida Academic and Research Center, and Nemours Children's Hospital in the area known as the "Medical City". Image courtesy of UCF VLP.

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Many veterans and their families get helpful support because of compensation and pension services through the VBA. *Compensation* means repayment for damages. If a veteran was hurt when they served, they can get compensation from the government. They get a tax-free payment each month to help with the cost of living. This is especially meant to help veterans if their injury keeps them from earning a full salary. Veterans and their families also get a *pension*, monthly money from the government when they retire.

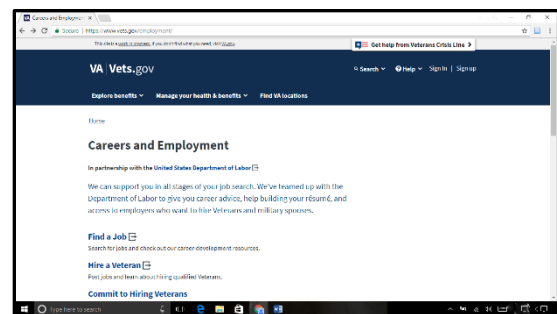


Image courtesy of Huffington Post.

Veterans are also eligible for educational benefits through the VBA. This means that veterans can get financial support for college or for a trade school. They can use their educational benefit to pay for *tuition*, or the cost of the classes, for books, and even for living expenses.

If after finishing school a veteran wants to work for the government, they receive an advantage when they apply for federal jobs. They also receive the same advantage at the state level. If you defend the nation and your state, you should be able to work for it. Some companies have special programs to hire veterans because companies know veterans have valuable experience. The VA offers resources and has online tools to help veterans when they're looking for a job and to help employers that want to hire veterans.

Many veterans and their families apply for loans through the VBA to help them buy a home or start a business. *Loans* are amounts of money that a person borrows from a bank and must pay back with *interest*, or extra. Banks are more willing to give loans to veterans because a VA loan is guaranteed by the government. If the veteran cannot make payments on the loan, the government guarantee means that the government promises to make payments on the loan for the veteran. This is good for banks because banks will not lose money on VA loans. This is good for veterans and their families because banks will give them these loans. From 1944 through December 1993, the VA guaranteed 13.9 million home loans valued at more than \$433.1 billion.



The Veteran's Employment Center website where veterans can search for a job.
Image courtesy of UCF VLP.

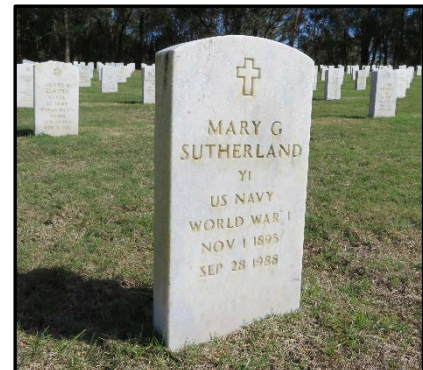
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The NCA directly runs 131 of the 135 national cemeteries across the United States which cover more than 21,400 acres of land. More than 3.5 million people are already honored by burial in these national cemeteries; and there are more than 22 million living veterans who have earned this honor.

Veterans are eligible for burial a national cemetery with military funeral honors. The honor of burial in a national cemetery includes the physical space of a gravesite, opening and closing of the grave, and continual maintenance of the gravesite. Public Law 106-65 requires that every eligible veteran receive a military funeral honors ceremony. This ceremony includes the folding and presenting the United States burial flag and the playing of *Taps*, a bugle call also played when the sun sets and during flag ceremonies. The ceremony is performed with two or more uniformed military persons, with at least one being a member of the veteran's parent service of the armed forces. National Cemetery Administration cemetery staff can also assist veterans' families with arranging military funeral honors at VA national cemeteries.

Through the NCA, the VA can provide a government headstone, marker or medallion for deceased veterans. These services must be ordered by cemetery officials based on requests by families. These services will be provided without cost to the family. Families can request a government headstone or marker for the unmarked grave of any deceased eligible Veteran in any cemetery around the world, no matter when the veteran died. Flat markers are usually made of granite, marble, and bronze while the upright headstones are either granite and marble. Bronze niche markers are also used to mark the site of cremated remains.



*A headstone in Florida National Cemetery.
Image courtesy of UCF VLP.*

As a part of the military funeral honors, a United States flag is draped over the casket or will be placed by the urn of a deceased Veteran. The flag is meant to honor the memory of a Veteran's military service to the country. As a part of the burial ceremony, the flag is ceremonially folded and given to the veterans' family as a keepsake.

Veterans' who are have been buried in a national cemetery are also eligible for a *Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC)*. A PMC is an engraved paper certificate that is signed by the current President. Like the burial flag, the PMC is a keepsake for the veteran's' family that is meant to honor the memory of the deceased veteran.

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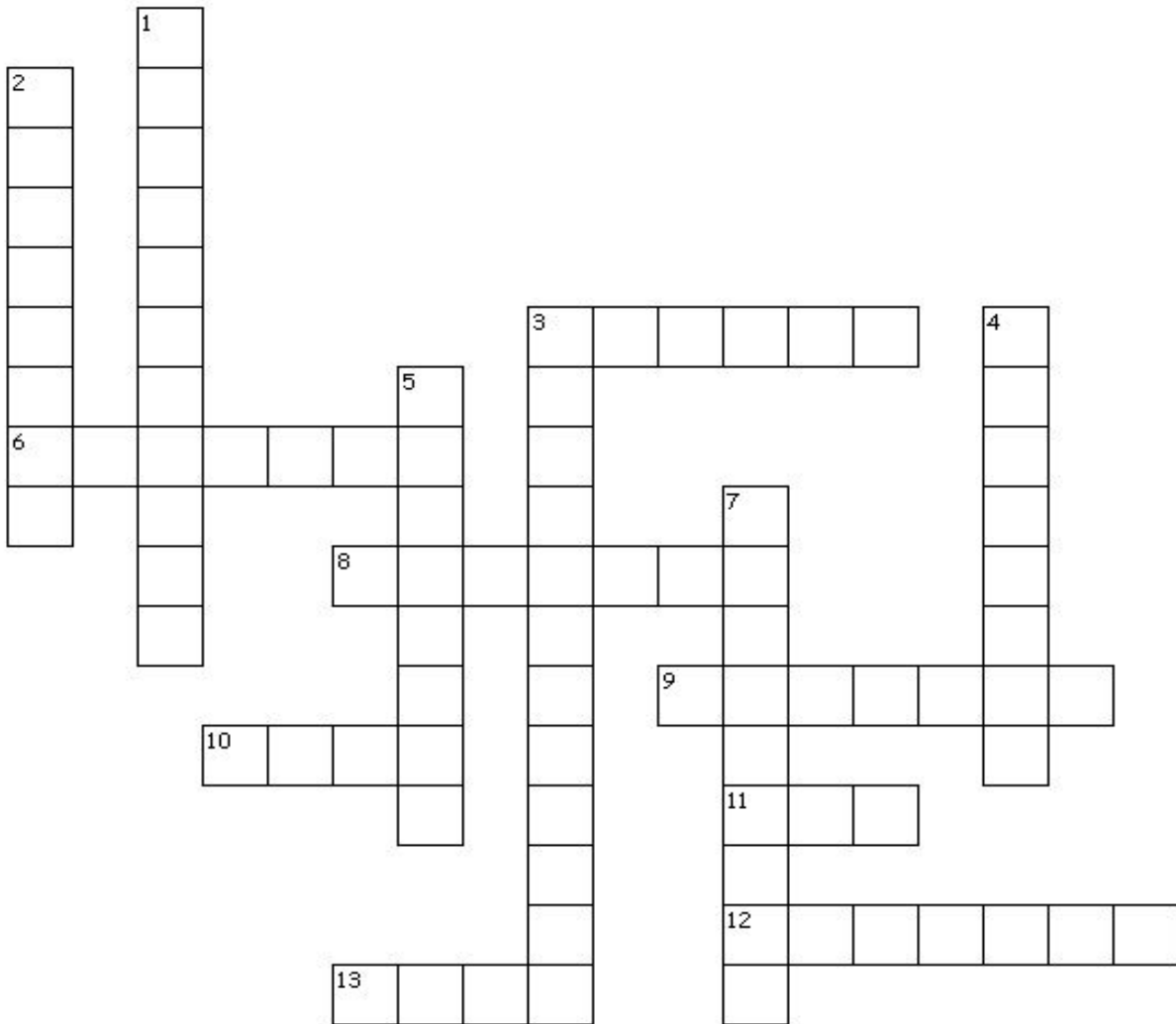
The 3 Veterans Administrations: VHA, VBA and NCA

Directions: Fill out the main idea and details/examples sections of the chart below after reading about the VHA, VBA and NCA. Fill out the brown bag items section of the chart during the brown bag activity.

VHA	VBA	NCA
Main Idea:	Main Idea:	Main Idea:
Details/Examples:	Details/Examples:	Details/Examples:
Brown Bag Items:	Brown Bag Items:	Brown Bag Items:

The 3 Veterans Administrations: Review Crossword

Directions: Use the reading to help you complete the crossword.



ACROSS

3. fighting
6. the cost of college or trade school classes
8. anyone who served the US in any of the branches the armed services
9. national
10. the name of the bugle call at the end of a military funeral
11. an engraved certificate signed by the President that honors a deceased veteran
12. to carry out
13. an amount of money a person or company borrows from a bank and must pay back

DOWN

1. a home for veterans
2. hospital, clinic, center or building
3. repayment for damages
4. non-military person or life
5. extra amount of money a bank earns from a loan
7. To decide the meaning of the law

Taking Care of U.S. Veterans

Name: _____

The 3 Veterans Administrations: Project

Total: _____/20 points

PART I: Item Directions: Find 3 different 3D items that will fit in a brown paper bag that represent different services that the VA provides for veterans. You must include at least 1 item for the VHA, 1 for the VBA and 1 for the NCA. You must include at least 1 item that could represent more than one VA organization. See the rubric below. (9 points total)

Points	3 points	2 points	1 point	0 points
Item 1	Quality 3D item with clear connection to VA	Quality 2D item with clear connection, 3D item with unclear connection to VA	2D item, Unclear connection to VA	No item
Item 2	Quality 3D item with clear connection to VA	Quality 2D item with clear connection, 3D item with unclear connection to VA	2D item, Unclear connection to VA	No item
*Item 3	Quality 3D item with 2 clear connections to VA	Quality 2D item with 2 clear connection, 3D item with 1-2 unclear connection to VA	2D item, Unclear or only 1 connection to VA	No item

PART II: Index Card Directions: Write 1 index card for each item in the bag. Write only on 1 side of the card. On each card, number your answers to match the questions. Answer the following sentence in complete sentences. Be clear and specific. See the rubric below. (9 points total)

- 1) What is the item?
- 2) Which VA organization(s) does it represent?
- 3) What specific VA service(s) does the item represent?

Points	3 points	2 points	1 point	0 points
Card 1	All complete sentences, All clear and specific answers	Complete sentences, at least 2 clear and specific answers	No complete sentences, 1-2 unclear answers, no specifics	No card
Card 2	All complete sentences, All clear and specific answers	Complete sentences, at least 2 clear and specific answers	No complete sentences, 1-2 unclear answers, no specifics	No card
Card 3	All complete sentences, All clear and specific answers	Complete sentences, at least 2 clear and specific answers	No complete sentences, 1-2 unclear answers, no specifics	No card

PART III: Reflection Directions: On the back of this page, answer the following questions with at least 4 complete sentences. Use your 3D items to help you be specific. 1 point for 4 complete sentences. 1 point for correctly and clearly answering the questions. (2 points total)

Which part of the United States government takes care of US veterans? How? Be specific.

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