

The Houses of Parliament **Comprehension Questions**

1. What are the three branches of the Parliament of the United Kingdom?
2. What are the main functions of the House of Commons?
3. Who sits in the Speaker's Chair and what does he do?
4. How do MPs vote in the House of Commons?
5. What does the House of Lords do?
6. What are Lords Temporal and Lords Spiritual?
7. What is the Woolsack?
8. What does Black Rod do during the State Opening of Parliament?
9. What is a constituency?
10. What happens if no one political party has enough seats to form a government?

Extension

Can you describe the law-making process in the UK?

Why do you think there are three independent branches to UK Parliament?

What do you think about all the ceremonies and traditions associated with the Houses of Parliament?

The Houses of Parliament **Comprehension Answers**

1. What are the three branches of the Parliament of the United Kingdom?
The House of Commons, The House of Lords and the monarchy.
2. What are the main functions of the House of Commons?
To scrutinise the work of the government, including the way the UK's budget is allocated and spent; to create legislation; and to debate key issues affecting the UK.
3. Who sits in the Speaker's Chair and what does he do?
The Speaker. He is an MP who controls the debates and is impartial.
4. How do MPs vote in the House of Commons?
They physically divide up according to how they wish to vote. They go to either the No Division Lobby or the Aye Division Lobby and their numbers are counted up.
5. What does the House of Lords do?
The Lords scrutinise and debate the work of the House of Commons. Any bills made by MPs have to go to the House of Lords for checking before they can be passed, and peers can insist that MPs revisit and reconsider certain aspects of the legislation.
6. What are Lords Temporal and Lords Spiritual?
Lords Temporal are peers who have either been nominated by political parties and made peers by the Queen (Life Peers), or who have inherited family titles (Hereditary Peers). Lords Spiritual are senior Bishops of the Church of England.
7. What is the Woolsack?
It is a red cushion stuffed with wool. The Lord Speaker sits on this in the House of Lords.
8. What does Black Rod do during the State Opening of Parliament?
He goes on behalf of the Queen to the House of Commons and knocks on the door three times with his staff. He is admitted, and summons MPs to the House of Lords to hear the Queen's speech.
9. What is a constituency?
It is a voting area in the UK. Votes in each constituency are counted up to decide who will represent the area as an MP.
10. What happens if no one political party has enough seats to form a government?
This is known as a hung Parliament. Two parties can unite to form a coalition government, provided that between them they have more than half the seats in the house – 326 or more.

Extension

Can you describe the law-making process in the UK?

Answers should explain the three basic stages:

- **MPs debate and draw up a bill;**
- **the Lords check the bill, sometimes sending it back for amendments or further consideration;**
- **the Queen passes an Act of Parliament.**

Why do you think there are three independent branches to UK Parliament?

Answers could include:

- **the importance of checks so that fewer mistakes are made in legislation and other important decisions;**
- **the importance of dividing authority so that no one body has absolute power;**
- **the fact that the different branches of Parliament will have different priorities (e.g. MPs will be mindful of the need to please the electorate and be re-elected).**
- **the importance of democracy – allowing the people a voice through their elected representatives – while retaining expertise and impartiality.**

What do you think about all the ceremonies and traditions associated with the Houses of Parliament?

Answers will give a personal response with specific reference to the text.