States Try New Rules

Government ideas and rights during the Critical Period

SS24.6.10c "Identify innovative ideas for democratic governance and the expansion of citizen rights that were included in state constitutions during the Critical Period."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number each way a state organized or checked government power, underline each voting rule or protected right, and circle each limit on who could vote.

What Could a State Constitution Do?

1. After the Revolutionary War, the United States had a weak national government. During the Critical Period, from 1783 to 1789, Americans looked to state constitutions for ways to govern. Some of these documents had been written before this period but were still in use. Pennsylvania's 1776 constitution offered a bold plan: voters chose a single lawmaking house rather than two. It also let free, taxpaying men aged 21 or older vote even if they owned no land. That rule widened voting beyond landowners, though it excluded many people.

2. Massachusetts kept its 1780 constitution during the Critical Period. It divided power among lawmakers, a governor, and courts so that no one part of government could hold it all. Its declaration of rights said that "all men are born free and equal." In 1783, Massachusetts judges used that principle in cases that helped end slavery in the state. The document also protected freedom of the press and the right to a jury trial. Yet voting for state offices still depended on being male and meeting property rules.

3. New Hampshire adopted a new constitution in 1784. It opened with a bill of rights that protected freedom of the press and the right to a jury trial. Voters chose a president, the state's chief executive, each year. That election gave voters a regular way to replace a leader. Still, the constitution did not give everyone an equal voice: women could not vote, and men classified as paupers were excluded from voting. These state plans offered new ways to share power and protect rights, but many people remained excluded.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What was unusual about Pennsylvania's lawmaking plan?

2. How did Pennsylvania's voting rule expand the right to vote, and who could still not vote under that rule?

3. Which right in the Massachusetts constitution helped bring about a change in 1783? What was that change?

4. Identify one way New Hampshire's constitution gave voters power over a leader and one right its bill of rights protected.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are advising a state convention in 1786. In four sentences, combine one way to share or check power and one voting rule or protected right from two different states in the passage, explain how each would affect people, and name one group your plan would still leave out.

ANSWER KEY

States Try New Rules

GRADE 6 · SS24.6.10c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number each way a state organized or checked government power, underline each voting rule or protected right, and circle each limit on who could vote. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What was unusual about Pennsylvania's lawmaking plan?	**Pennsylvania had one elected lawmaking house rather than two.**
2	How did Pennsylvania's voting rule expand the right to vote, and who could still not vote under that rule?	**Free, taxpaying men aged 21 or older could vote without owning land. Women and men who did not meet the rule were excluded.**
3	Which right in the Massachusetts constitution helped bring about a change in 1783? What was that change?	**Its declaration said that all men were born free and equal. Judges used that principle in cases that helped end slavery in Massachusetts.**
4	Identify one way New Hampshire's constitution gave voters power over a leader and one right its bill of rights protected.	**Voters chose the state's president each year. The bill of rights protected freedom of the press or the right to a jury trial.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would borrow Massachusetts's plan to divide power among lawmakers, a governor, and courts, so one part of government could not make every decision. I would also borrow Pennsylvania's voting rule for free, taxpaying adult men who did not own land. That rule would give more people a say in choosing lawmakers. Women would still be excluded from voting under this plan.

Accept any accurate combination of a power-sharing or checking idea and a voting rule or protected right from two different states. The response should explain an effect of each choice and identify a group the proposed plan still excludes.