Power Has Limits

Read how a written constitution limits government power.

SS24.6.13a "Explain how a written constitution aids in establishing limited government and the rule of law."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two limits on government power in the passage. Circle the sentence that shows how a court can enforce a limit.

Can the President Stop the Press?

1 On a busy morning, a newspaper prints a story questioning a president's plan. The president dislikes the story and tells federal workers to stop the next issue. Can the president do that? In the United States, the Constitution is a written plan for government that people can read. It gives Congress the job of making federal laws, the president the job of carrying them out, and federal courts the job of deciding cases under those laws. A president cannot create a new law simply by giving an order.

2 The Constitution also sets limits on what government may do. The First Amendment protects freedom of speech and of the press. That means the government cannot stop a newspaper just because it criticizes a president. Congress cannot erase that protection by passing an ordinary law against such criticism, either. Because these limits are written down, the newspaper can point to the same words that government officials must follow. A written limit gives people a way to explain exactly why an action crosses the line.

3 The newspaper could ask a federal court to review the president's order. A judge would compare the order with the Constitution, not just ask whether the president likes the article. If the order violates the First Amendment, the court can block it. This shows the rule of law: people in power must follow the law, too. The president cannot set aside a court ruling just by disagreeing with it. Written rules help courts and citizens hold officials to limits that apply even when leaders are angry.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the Constitution's written jobs for each branch limit what the president can do alone?

2. Why does the First Amendment limit the president's order to stop the newspaper?

3. How could the newspaper use the written Constitution to challenge the order?

4. Suppose Congress passed a law banning stories that criticize the president. Why would that law still face a limit?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a president orders federal workers to take away signs that criticize a new law at a peaceful protest. In three sentences, explain how the written Constitution could limit the order and how the rule of law would apply.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 6 · SS24.6.13a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two limits on government power in the passage. Circle the sentence that shows how a court can enforce a limit. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the Constitution's written jobs for each branch limit what the president can do alone?	**Congress makes federal laws, so the president cannot make a new law by giving an order.**
2	Why does the First Amendment limit the president's order to stop the newspaper?	**It protects freedom of the press, so the government cannot stop a newspaper just because it criticizes the president.**
3	How could the newspaper use the written Constitution to challenge the order?	**It could point to the First Amendment and ask a federal court to review the order.**
4	Suppose Congress passed a law banning stories that criticize the president. Why would that law still face a limit?	**Congress must follow the Constitution, and an ordinary law cannot erase the First Amendment's protection of the press.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The First Amendment protects freedom of speech, so the president cannot take away signs just because they criticize a law. Protesters could use that written protection to challenge the order in court. The rule of law means the president must obey the Constitution and any court ruling about the order.

Accept answers that connect a written constitutional limit to an action by a government official or Congress. For Part 3, look for protected speech, a way to challenge the order, and the idea that the president must follow the law.