Power and Its Price

How absolute rule changed Russia and Prussia

SS24.8.14c "Describe how the development of absolutism affected governments in Russia and Prussia under the reigns of Peter the Great, Frederick the Great, and Catherine the Great."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one change to government made by each ruler. Circle a group affected by each ruler's decisions so you can trace who gained power and who faced new demands.

Three Rulers, Two Kingdoms

1. Imagine a Russian noble arriving at Peter the Great's court in the early 1700s. Fancy clothing mattered less than service to the ruler. Peter built a stronger army and navy, and he required nobles to serve the state. His Table of Ranks offered promotion based on government or military service, not only family background. He also placed the Russian Orthodox Church under state supervision. These changes made the central government more powerful, but taxes and forced labor to support Peter's projects placed heavy demands on ordinary people.

2. Across Europe, Frederick the Great ruled Prussia from 1740 to 1786. He kept a large, disciplined army and used royal officials to carry out decisions across the kingdom. Frederick argued that a ruler should work for the state, and he supported religious toleration and some changes to the courts. Yet he made these choices himself, without sharing power with an elected legislature. Landowning nobles still held important army and government posts, while many peasants remained bound to estates. Reform and royal control could exist side by side.

3. Catherine the Great became ruler of Russia in 1762. She admired Enlightenment ideas and asked a commission to consider a new set of laws, but it did not produce one. Catherine also gave nobles greater control over their estates and confirmed their special rights in the Charter to the Nobility. Many serfs faced harsher limits on their freedom as noble power grew. Like Peter, she depended on officials and nobles to govern a vast empire. Her reign shows that an absolute ruler could discuss reform while protecting the groups that supported the throne.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Peter's Table of Ranks change the way people could gain positions in Russia's government?

2. How did Frederick use officials to strengthen royal control in Prussia?

3. How did Catherine's treatment of nobles affect her rule and the lives of serfs?

4. What do Frederick's and Catherine's reigns show about the relationship between reform and absolute power?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence advice note to an imaginary absolute ruler. Use two rulers from the passage as evidence, propose one new policy that could strengthen the government without placing more demands on ordinary people, and explain why it might work.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · SS24.8.14c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one change to government made by each ruler. Circle a group affected by each ruler's decisions so you can trace who gained power and who faced new demands. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Peter's Table of Ranks change the way people could gain positions in Russia's government?	**It offered promotion through government or military service, rather than only through family background.**
2	How did Frederick use officials to strengthen royal control in Prussia?	**Royal officials carried out his decisions across the kingdom.**
3	How did Catherine's treatment of nobles affect her rule and the lives of serfs?	**She confirmed nobles' special rights and gave them greater control over estates, strengthening a group she depended on to govern. Many serfs faced harsher limits on their freedom.**
4	What do Frederick's and Catherine's reigns show about the relationship between reform and absolute power?	**Both considered or supported reforms while keeping power in the ruler's hands. Frederick made decisions without an elected legislature, and Catherine's proposed new laws did not result in a new legal code.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Peter the Great strengthened the state by requiring nobles to serve, but his projects burdened ordinary people with taxes and forced labor. Frederick the Great used royal officials to carry out decisions and supported changes to the courts. I advise you to train officials to record tax payments accurately and investigate unfair collections instead of demanding more unpaid labor. This policy could help the crown collect taxes already owed while easing pressure on peasants.

For Part 3, accept a plausible new policy supported by accurate evidence about two rulers. The response should explain how the policy strengthens government without increasing demands on ordinary people.