Laws Across Centuries

Trace how an ancient legal project influenced later codes.

SS24.8.2c "Analyze the influence of the Code of Justinian on modern legal codes."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show a path from Justinian's project to later legal codes. Circle one detail that shows modern law is not simply ancient law repeated.

From Roman Rules to Modern Codes

1 Imagine two neighbors arguing over who owns a narrow strip of land. A court needs more than a ruler; it needs rules about property and a way to settle disagreements. After the western Roman Empire fell, Roman government continued in the eastern empire. In the 500s, Emperor Justinian I ordered legal experts to gather and organize centuries of Roman law. Their work included a collection of imperial laws, a summary of legal writings, and a textbook for students. Later scholars called these works the *Corpus Juris Civilis*.

2 Justinian's project did not give every person equal rights. Its rules reflected a society with slavery and unequal power. Still, the written collection helped preserve legal ideas that might otherwise have been scattered across many sources. Centuries later, scholars in western Europe studied Roman law, especially in universities. Judges and lawmakers could compare rules about property, contracts, and other disputes. The route was not a straight line from Justinian to today: later thinkers changed Roman ideas to fit new governments and new views of rights.

3 One result appears in civil-law systems used in much of continental Europe. Their lawmakers often place broad rules into organized written codes, then judges apply those rules to cases. France's 1804 Civil Code grew from several sources, including Roman law studied through Justinian's collection. It was not a copy of that collection. In contrast, courts in England's common-law tradition have placed more weight on earlier court decisions, although they also use written laws. Justinian's lasting influence lies partly in how law is collected, studied, and adapted, not in every ancient rule surviving.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could Justinian's written collection help lawmakers centuries later, even if they changed the rules?

2. Trace a path from Justinian's project to France's 1804 Civil Code. Include what happened between them.

3. Why would it be misleading to say that modern codes simply copied Justinian's rules? Use two details from the passage.

4. How does the passage suggest Justinian's influence may differ between civil-law systems and England's common-law tradition?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A new town has rules scattered across council notes and old court decisions. Write four or five sentences recommending a Justinian-inspired way to organize its laws, explaining how it could help settle a new dispute about shared bicycles, and naming one part of Justinian's society the town should not copy.

ANSWER KEY

Laws Across Centuries

GRADE 8 · SS24.8.2c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show a path from Justinian's project to later legal codes. Circle one detail that shows modern law is not simply ancient law repeated. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could Justinian's written collection help lawmakers centuries later, even if they changed the rules?	**It preserved Roman legal ideas in an organized form that later scholars and lawmakers could study, compare, and adapt.**
2	Trace a path from Justinian's project to France's 1804 Civil Code. Include what happened between them.	**Justinian's experts collected Roman law. Centuries later, western European scholars studied it, and Roman law became one of several sources for France's 1804 Civil Code.**
3	Why would it be misleading to say that modern codes simply copied Justinian's rules? Use two details from the passage.	**Later thinkers changed Roman ideas to fit new governments and views of rights, and France's Civil Code drew on several sources rather than copying Justinian's collection.**
4	How does the passage suggest Justinian's influence may differ between civil-law systems and England's common-law tradition?	**Civil-law systems often use organized written codes, a practice connected to the study of Roman law. England's common-law tradition has placed more weight on earlier court decisions, though it also uses written laws.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The town should gather its scattered rules in a public, organized code. A section on shared bicycles could say who pays when a borrowed bike is damaged. A judge could use that rule instead of guessing from conflicting council notes. Unlike Justinian's unequal society, the town should not accept slavery or give some residents fewer legal rights.

Accept other accurate paths of influence that include the collection, later study, and adaptation. For the open task, look for an organized-code proposal, a specific use in a bicycle dispute, and rejection of slavery or unequal legal rights.