A King Bound

Read how a written agreement challenged royal power.

SS24.8.7e "Summarize the significance of the issuing of the Magna Carta in limiting royal power and establishing the rule of law."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two rules that limit what the king can do, circle a phrase showing who did not receive the same protections, and number one sentence that explains why Magna Carta mattered later.

The King and the Charter

1. In 1215, King John of England faced a revolt by powerful barons. He had demanded heavy payments to fund wars, and many barons believed he used his authority unfairly. At Runnymede, near London, the barons pressured John to place his seal on a written agreement called Magna Carta, or Great Charter. This was not a vote by all English people. It was a deal between a king and leading subjects during a crisis. Yet putting royal promises in writing gave people a way to point to rules the king was expected to follow.

2. Some clauses restricted what the king could do. Certain payments from the barons required the "common counsel" of the kingdom, rather than the king's decision alone. Other clauses said that justice could not be sold, denied, or delayed. The charter also said that a free man could not be imprisoned or stripped of his rights except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land. These rules did not end royal power. They challenged the idea that a king's command, by itself, made an action lawful.

3. John did not keep the agreement for long, and the pope canceled the 1215 charter within months. Later English rulers reissued revised versions, and Magna Carta became a lasting symbol that rulers must obey the law. Its protections were limited: many people, including most women and unfree peasants, did not gain the same legal rights described for free men. Over time, people drew on its ideas to argue against unchecked government power. Its importance lies less in creating instant freedom for everyone than in setting a powerful example of law above a ruler's wishes.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the rule about certain payments limit the king's power?

2. How did the rule about imprisoning free men support the idea that the king must obey the law?

3. Why did limiting the king's power not mean that everyone gained equal rights?

4. Why did Magna Carta remain significant after the 1215 charter was canceled?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A royal official says, “These written promises cannot change anything because the king is above the law.” Write four sentences that use one rule from the passage to challenge this claim, explain how that rule could affect a free person, acknowledge one limit of the charter, and give your verdict on the official's claim.

ANSWER KEY

A King Bound

GRADE 8 · SS24.8.7e

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two rules that limit what the king can do, circle a phrase showing who did not receive the same protections, and number one sentence that explains why Magna Carta mattered later. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the rule about certain payments limit the king's power?	**The king could not demand certain payments from the barons by his decision alone. He needed the kingdom's common counsel.**
2	How did the rule about imprisoning free men support the idea that the king must obey the law?	**The king's order alone was not enough to imprison a free man. The imprisonment had to follow a lawful judgment or the law of the land.**
3	Why did limiting the king's power not mean that everyone gained equal rights?	**The charter's protections were limited. Most women and unfree peasants did not gain the same rights described for free men.**
4	Why did Magna Carta remain significant after the 1215 charter was canceled?	**Later rulers reissued revised versions, and people used its ideas to argue that rulers must obey the law rather than exercise unchecked power.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The official is wrong because Magna Carta said a free man could not be jailed without a lawful judgment or the law of the land. A free person held on the king's order alone could use that written rule to challenge the imprisonment. The charter did not give unfree peasants the same protections. Although the 1215 agreement was canceled, later reissues strengthened the idea that rulers must answer to the law.

Accept responses that accurately connect a passage rule to a limit on royal power and explain why the charter's reach was limited. Students may use the rules about payments, justice, or imprisonment as evidence.