Who Gets a Seat?

How district decisions shape House elections

SS24.USG.11b "Evaluate the effects of reapportionment, redistricting, and gerrymandering on congressional elections."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle the population changes or boundary choices that affect elections, and underline their effects on seats, voters, or competition. Write R, D, or G beside each example of reapportionment, redistricting, or gerrymandering.

Five Seats in Northbank

1. After a census, the imaginary state of Northbank learns that its population grew more slowly than populations elsewhere. The House has 435 voting seats, allocated among states using census counts every ten years. In reapportionment, Northbank loses one seat, dropping from six representatives to five, even though its own population rose. It will hold five House elections instead of six, and its share of House votes declines. A neighboring state that gains a seat holds one more election. Reapportionment changes how many seats a state receives, not which neighborhoods share a district.

2. Northbank must now redraw its five districts. New borders can move a neighborhood into a district with different candidates and voters. Residents may find themselves voting for a different incumbent, and a contest that was close under the old map may become safe for one party. The state still elects five representatives; redistricting changes who votes together, not the number of seats. Lawmakers in many states draw these lines, while independent commissions do so in some states. Districts within a state must have nearly equal populations, but many boundary choices remain. Those choices can affect which voters have influence in a particular race.

3. Suppose both parties win roughly half the votes statewide. Mapmakers pack many Blue voters into one district and spread remaining Blue voters thinly across four others. Red candidates might then win four of five seats. This is partisan gerrymandering: drawing boundaries to favor a party rather than simply reflecting where voters live. It can make several elections less competitive and leave many Blue voters with little influence over who wins their district, though they can still vote. Boundary rules, including equal population and the Voting Rights Act, limit mapmakers' choices; partisan advantage alone does not determine whether a map violates federal law.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does reapportionment change the number of House elections in Northbank and in the neighboring state?

2. How could moving a Northbank neighborhood into a new district affect its residents and the election, even though the state still has five seats?

3. Why might Red candidates win four of Northbank's five seats even if the parties receive roughly equal numbers of votes statewide?

4. Compare the effects of Northbank's lost seat and the proposed partisan map. What does each change about representation?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine another state keeps its four House seats after a census, but its population shifts toward the suburbs. In one paragraph, propose how officials should redraw its districts, then evaluate one benefit of your approach and one risk if mapmakers instead favor a party.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.11b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle the population changes or boundary choices that affect elections, and underline their effects on seats, voters, or competition. Write R, D, or G beside each example of reapportionment, redistricting, or gerrymandering. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does reapportionment change the number of House elections in Northbank and in the neighboring state?	**Northbank holds five elections instead of six because it loses a seat. The neighboring state holds one more election because it gains a seat.**
2	How could moving a Northbank neighborhood into a new district affect its residents and the election, even though the state still has five seats?	**Residents could vote among different candidates, including a different incumbent. The new mix of voters could also make a formerly close race safer for one party.**
3	Why might Red candidates win four of Northbank's five seats even if the parties receive roughly equal numbers of votes statewide?	**A map could pack Blue voters into one district and spread the remaining Blue voters across four districts where Red candidates win.**
4	Compare the effects of Northbank's lost seat and the proposed partisan map. What does each change about representation?	**Losing a seat reduces Northbank's number of representatives from six to five. The partisan map would not change that total, but it could give Red candidates four of the five seats despite roughly equal statewide votes.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Because the state keeps four House seats, it should still have four districts. Officials should redraw the boundaries so the districts have nearly equal populations after the shift toward the suburbs. They could use an independent commission and explain why each community is placed in a district. Updated districts would give suburban residents representation based on current population. But mapmakers trying to help one party could split its opponents among several districts or pack them into one. That could make races less competitive and allow one party to win more seats than its share of votes suggests.

Accept other plausible effects on candidates, voters, or competition when students connect them to the correct boundary or seat change. The open response should distinguish keeping four seats from redrawing four districts and identify a specific risk of partisan line-drawing.