Power With Limits

How the Constitution organizes and restrains government

SS24.USG.3 "Analyze the major features and structural organization of the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights. 3a Summarize and explain the underlying principles of the Constitution, including checks and balances, federalism..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each principle that organizes or limits government, circle the words that explain how it works, and number the two stages of amending the Constitution.

Who Holds the Power?

1. The Constitution divides public authority instead of handing it to one office. Its opening words, "We the People," express popular sovereignty; citizens choose representatives under republicanism. Articles I, II, and III assign legislative, executive, and judicial powers to different branches, a separation of powers. Checks and balances let Congress override a presidential veto by a two-thirds vote in each chamber. Federalism divides authority between national and state governments. Limited government means officials must obey constitutional limits, including protections for individual rights.

2. The Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments, protects freedoms such as speech and religion and sets limits on federal power. The Constitution also provides a demanding way to change its text. An amendment may be proposed by two-thirds of both houses of Congress or by a convention called after two-thirds of state legislatures apply. It becomes part of the Constitution only when three-fourths of the states ratify it, through legislatures or state conventions, as Congress specifies. This process requires broad agreement beyond any single election.

3. After the Civil War, the Fourteenth Amendment placed new limits on state governments. Its Due Process Clause says a state cannot take a person's life, liberty, or property without due process of law; courts have used it to apply many Bill of Rights protections to states. Its Equal Protection Clause requires states to give people equal protection of the laws. In Brown v. Board of Education, the Supreme Court held that racial segregation in public schools violated equal protection, protecting Black students from state-enforced segregation.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do popular sovereignty and republicanism work together in the Constitution?

2. How do separation of powers and checks and balances each limit national officials?

3. What are the two ways to propose an amendment, and what must happen before it takes effect?

4. How did the Fourteenth Amendment change protections against state action, and how does Brown illustrate one change?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A state bans residents from criticizing the governor when they speak at public meetings. In 70 to 95 words, explain how two constitutional principles and one Bill of Rights protection could guide a challenge, and why the Fourteenth Amendment matters.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each principle that organizes or limits government, circle the words that explain how it works, and number the two stages of amending the Constitution. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do popular sovereignty and republicanism work together in the Constitution?	**Authority comes from the people, who exercise it by choosing representatives.**
2	How do separation of powers and checks and balances each limit national officials?	**The branches have different powers, and one branch can restrain another, as when Congress overrides a presidential veto.**
3	What are the two ways to propose an amendment, and what must happen before it takes effect?	**Two-thirds of both houses of Congress may propose it, or a convention may be called after two-thirds of state legislatures apply. Three-fourths of the states must then ratify it through legislatures or conventions.**
4	How did the Fourteenth Amendment change protections against state action, and how does Brown illustrate one change?	**Due process has been used to apply many Bill of Rights protections to states, while equal protection limits unequal treatment by states. Brown held that racial segregation in public schools violated equal protection.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The state rule singles out criticism of the governor, not disruptions, so it conflicts with the First Amendment protection for speech. Popular sovereignty depends on residents being able to question their elected leaders. Limited government means state officials cannot silence a viewpoint simply because they dislike it. The Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause makes many Bill of Rights protections, including free speech, enforceable against states. A court could therefore reject this viewpoint ban while still allowing neutral rules that keep meetings orderly.

Accept other accurately explained principles, such as republicanism, in the open response. Students should distinguish a ban on criticism from neutral rules governing when people may speak.