

Power by the People

Read how the Constitution drew on earlier ideas to shape American democracy.

SS.5.A.5.10 "Examine the significance of the Constitution including its key political concepts, origins of those concepts, and their role in American democracy."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline every occurrence of these political concepts: natural rights, consent of the governed, limited government, popular sovereignty, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism. Circle only these named historical sources: Enlightenment thinkers and the Magna Carta.

Ideas Behind the Constitution

- ① In 1787, delegates met in Philadelphia to write the Constitution. They wanted a stronger national government than the Articles of Confederation had provided, but they did not want a ruler with unlimited power. The Constitution created a plan for governing the United States. Its ideas helped form an American democracy, a government in which people have a voice in public decisions.
- ② The idea of natural rights says that people have rights that government must respect. Enlightenment thinkers wrote about natural rights and consent of the governed, the idea that government gets its power from the people. The Magna Carta, an English document from 1215, supported limited government, meaning that leaders must obey laws. These earlier ideas influenced the Constitution's writers.
- ③ Popular sovereignty means that the people are the source of government power. The words "We the People" show this idea. Separation of powers divides power among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Checks and balances let each branch limit the others. Federalism shares power between national and state governments. Together, these concepts prevent one group from controlling everything and protect self-government.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

1 Which political concept is shown by the words "We the People"? What does that concept mean?

2 Which historical source supported limited government? What does limited government require leaders to do?

3 How do separation of powers and checks and balances help keep one group from controlling everything?

4 Why are popular sovereignty, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism important in American democracy?

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Write exactly three sentences for a school constitution. Name at least two political concepts from the passage, tell the historical source of one concept, and explain how one concept would help people share power or protect rights.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline every occurrence of these political concepts: natural rights, consent of the governed, limited government, popular sovereignty, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism. Circle only these named historical sources: Enlightenment thinkers and the Magna Carta. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which political concept is shown by the words "We the People"? What does that concept mean?	Popular sovereignty. It means that the people are the source of government power.
2	Which historical source supported limited government? What does limited government require leaders to do?	The Magna Carta. Limited government requires leaders to obey laws.
3	How do separation of powers and checks and balances help keep one group from controlling everything?	Separation of powers divides power among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Checks and balances allow each branch to limit the others.
4	Why are popular sovereignty, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism important in American democracy?	Together, they prevent one group from controlling everything and protect self-government.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Popular sovereignty would let students vote for class representatives. Limited government, inspired by the Magna Carta, would keep the student council from making rules that violate students' rights. Separation of powers would give different student groups the jobs of making, carrying out, and reviewing school rules.

Accept answers that use the passage's stated meanings and connections between concepts, sources, and democracy. For the open response, accept reasonable school examples that meet all three sentence requirements and accurately connect at least one concept to Enlightenment thinkers or the Magna Carta.