

Laws Shape Liberty

Trace how ancient legal ideas influenced the United States.

SS.6.CG.1.3 "Examine rule of law in the ancient world and its influence on the United States' constitutional republic."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show how written laws can limit government power. Circle details that show where ancient legal systems were unfair or limited.

From Stone Laws to the Constitution

- ① Nearly four thousand years ago, Babylonian King Hammurabi ordered laws carved on a tall stone pillar. The laws covered trade, property, family matters, and crimes. Putting rules in writing made them more public and predictable than decisions based only on a leader's wishes. People could know some expected penalties before a dispute occurred. Yet Hammurabi's Code was not equal for everyone. Punishments often differed according to a person's social rank, and the king held great power. It shows an early step toward rule of law, but not a modern system of equal justice.
- ② In ancient Rome, the Twelve Tables were displayed in public places after ordinary citizens demanded that laws be known. Written laws limited the chance that powerful officials could claim secret rules. Rome still gave different rights to different groups, and many people had no voice in government. Centuries later, English ideas about legal rights also shaped American thinking. These ancient and later examples helped build the idea that government power should be limited by known laws. Rule of law means laws, rather than personal power, guide government decisions.
- ③ The United States formed a constitutional republic with a written Constitution as the highest law. The Constitution divides national power among Congress, the president, and the courts. Courts can decide whether government actions follow the Constitution, including actions by officials. The Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments require due process, meaning government must use fair legal procedures. The Fourteenth Amendment also requires equal protection of the laws. The United States drew on the ancient idea of written, known laws, while rejecting ancient systems that gave unequal legal treatment because of social rank.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How did carving Hammurabi's laws on a stone pillar make legal decisions more predictable?

2 What is one reason Hammurabi's Code did not provide equal justice?

3 Name two features of the United States constitutional republic that help limit government power under law.

4 What ancient rule-of-law idea did the United States use, and what unfair ancient practice did it reject?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Imagine your school is creating a new rule for borrowing sports equipment. Write exactly 5 sentences that state the rule and explain how it will be known, applied equally, and enforced through a fair procedure. Include one sentence explaining how your plan limits the power of the person enforcing the rule.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline details that show how written laws can limit government power. Circle details that show where ancient legal systems were unfair or limited. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did carving Hammurabi's laws on a stone pillar make legal decisions more predictable?	The laws were written and public, so people could know expected penalties before a dispute occurred.
2	What is one reason Hammurabi's Code did not provide equal justice?	Punishments often differed according to a person's social rank.
3	Name two features of the United States constitutional republic that help limit government power under law.	The written Constitution is the highest law, and power is divided among Congress, the president, and the courts. Courts can also decide whether government actions follow the Constitution.
4	What ancient rule-of-law idea did the United States use, and what unfair ancient practice did it reject?	The United States used the idea of written, known laws. It rejected unequal legal treatment based on social rank.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Students may borrow one ball at a time and must return it by the end of lunch. The rule will be posted near the equipment shelf and in the student handbook. Every student will follow the same borrowing rule. If a ball is missing, the equipment manager will first ask the student what happened before deciding on a consequence. The manager must follow the posted procedure and cannot make up a different penalty for one student.

Accept responses that accurately connect written, public laws and limits on officials to rule of law. For Part 3, look for exactly five sentences with a clear rule, equal treatment, fair procedure, public notice, and a limit on the enforcer's power.