

Power Under Law

Read how legal limits shaped government in the United States.

SS.7.CG.1.11 "Define the rule of law and recognize its influence on the development of legal, political, and governmental systems in the United States."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the sentence that defines *rule of law*, and circle three details that show how it limits government power or shapes U.S. government.

Laws Above Leaders

- ① Rule of law means that laws govern a country, not the personal wishes of a ruler or official. Under this idea, the same laws apply to people and government leaders. Laws must be public, clear enough to follow, and enforced through fair procedures. Courts can review disputes, and accused people receive a chance to defend themselves. These limits on power help protect individual rights. Rule of law does not mean every law is perfect. It means laws can be challenged and changed through lawful processes.
- ② The idea developed over centuries in England. In 1215, the Magna Carta stated that the king had to obey certain legal limits. Later, English lawmakers and courts added protections against arbitrary government action. Colonists in North America brought these traditions with them. Many protested British policies because they believed government should follow established law and respect rights. After independence, state constitutions and the U.S. Constitution created written rules for officials, legislatures, and courts to follow.
- ③ In the United States, the rule of law shapes all three branches of government. Congress must pass laws using constitutional powers. Presidents and other executive officials must carry out laws rather than act outside them. Courts decide cases by applying laws and the Constitution, including when a government action is challenged. The Constitution can be amended, and legislatures can revise many laws, but officials must use the required process. This structure prevents any one person or branch from having unlimited power.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

1 What does *rule of law* mean?

2 Name two features that laws need under the rule of law.

3 How did English legal traditions influence the colonists' ideas about government?

4 How does the rule of law limit the power of the three branches of the U.S. government?

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

A mayor wants to close a public library after a resident criticizes the mayor. A city ordinance requires a council vote before the library can close. Write three sentences explaining what the rule of law requires in this situation.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline the sentence that defines *rule of law*, and circle three details that show how it limits government power or shapes U.S. government. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does <i>rule of law</i> mean?	Laws govern the country rather than the personal wishes of a ruler or official.
2	Name two features that laws need under the rule of law.	Laws must be public, clear enough to follow, and enforced through fair procedures. Accept any two.
3	How did English legal traditions influence the colonists' ideas about government?	The traditions taught that government should follow established law, respect rights, and have legal limits on its power.
4	How does the rule of law limit the power of the three branches of the U.S. government?	Congress must use constitutional powers to pass laws, executive officials must carry out laws, and courts apply laws and the Constitution when deciding cases.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The mayor must follow the city ordinance, even though the resident criticized the mayor. The city council should hold the required vote before closing the library. If the mayor ignores the law, a court could review the action if someone challenges it.

Accept responses that explain that the mayor is bound by the same legal process as others and that the required council vote must occur. Students may reasonably mention a court review or challenge if the mayor acts outside the ordinance.