Who Checks the King?

Trace how law, representation, and courts limited royal power.

9-12.WC.30 "Explain key developments in medieval English legal and constitutional history, including the impact of the Magna Carta on limiting the monarch's power, the development of a Parliament, establishing the rule of law..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one way royal power was checked in each paragraph. Circle the people or groups involved in each check to trace how those limits developed.

Limits on a Medieval King

1 In 1215, King John faced armed resistance from English barons after costly wars and heavy demands for money. At Runnymede, he sealed Magna Carta, a written agreement that placed some limits on royal action. It said that the king could not demand certain payments from his leading subjects without common counsel. It also promised that no free man would be imprisoned or stripped of rights except by lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land. John soon rejected the charter, but later kings reissued it. Its lasting importance lay in the claim that even a king must obey law.

2 Kings still needed money to govern and fight wars, so consultation took a more regular form. During the 1200s, councils that advised the monarch grew into Parliament. In 1295, Edward I summoned nobles and clergy along with knights from counties and representatives from towns. These groups did not speak for everyone, and the monarch still held great power. Yet their participation gave some communities a way to present grievances and discuss taxes. Over time, monarchs increasingly sought Parliament's consent to taxation. This changed a demand for money from a decision made by the king alone into a matter requiring negotiation with representatives.

3 Another change took place in royal courts. From the late 1100s, reforms associated with Henry II expanded the use of local people sworn to give information in legal cases. Over time, juries came to decide whether an accused person was guilty in many criminal trials. Magna Carta's promise of judgment by peers did not create the modern jury trial, but both developments challenged punishment based solely on a ruler's will. Together, the charter, Parliament, and evolving court practices helped build the rule of law: public authority should follow established rules and procedures. These protections grew unevenly and initially excluded many people.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Magna Carta limit what the king could do to a free man accused of wrongdoing?

2. How did Parliament extend the idea of consultation found in Magna Carta?

3. Why would it be inaccurate to say that Magna Carta created the modern jury trial?

4. Use two developments from the passage to explain how England moved toward the rule of law. Why was this change incomplete?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a medieval king orders a merchant jailed without a hearing and demands a new tax without consulting representatives. Write four or five sentences advising the merchant's town council. Explain how Magna Carta, Parliament, and developing jury trials could challenge the king's actions, and identify one historical limit to these protections.

ANSWER KEY

Who Checks the King?

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one way royal power was checked in each paragraph. Circle the people or groups involved in each check to trace how those limits developed. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Magna Carta limit what the king could do to a free man accused of wrongdoing?	**The king could not imprison him or strip him of rights except by lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land.**
2	How did Parliament extend the idea of consultation found in Magna Carta?	**Magna Carta required common counsel for certain payments. Parliament gave representatives a regular role in discussing taxes, and monarchs increasingly sought its consent to taxation.**
3	Why would it be inaccurate to say that Magna Carta created the modern jury trial?	**Its promise of judgment by peers did not create the modern jury trial. Juries developed over time through changes in royal courts.**
4	Use two developments from the passage to explain how England moved toward the rule of law. Why was this change incomplete?	**Magna Carta put legal limits on the king, and juries reduced punishment based only on a ruler's will. The change was incomplete because protections initially excluded many people.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The council could point to Magna Carta's promise that a free man should not be imprisoned without lawful judgment or the law of the land. A developing jury trial could let local people, rather than the king alone, help decide the merchant's case. The council could ask its representatives in Parliament to challenge the tax and seek a voice in decisions about it. These protections were limited because they developed unevenly and did not initially include everyone.

Accept explanations that distinguish Magna Carta's judgment-by-peers clause from the later development of jury trials. Students should not claim that Parliament represented everyone or that its consent was required for every tax throughout the medieval period.