Who Decides Justice?

Three Greek philosophers, three ways to examine a public decision

9-12.WC.7 "Analyze the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers including but not limited to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and their impact on Western thought."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one key idea for each philosopher and circle a later influence connected to each idea. Write 1 beside two claims that show a difference between philosophers.

A City Asks What Is Fair

1. Imagine a city deciding whether a law is fair. In Athens, Socrates (469–399 BCE) might have asked its supporters what they meant by fairness and whether their examples agreed with their definition. He left no writings; much of what we know comes from dialogues written by his student Plato. Socrates did not offer a fixed checklist for just laws. His questions pushed people to test claims they had accepted without proof. Athens convicted him of impiety and corrupting the young, and he was executed. His method helped shape later Western traditions of debate, where a claim must survive careful questioning.

2. Plato took the question of justice beyond a single law. In *Republic*, he argued that a well-ordered city should be guided by rulers trained to know what is good, rather than by whoever can win a crowd's approval. His theory of Forms held that changing things we see are imperfect compared with stable realities, such as Justice itself. These views challenged the idea that popular opinion is a reliable guide to truth. Later Western thinkers repeatedly argued over his questions: Should political leaders be chosen for wisdom, and can reason reach truths beyond what the senses show?

3. Aristotle, Plato's student, investigated the world through observation as well as reasoning. He studied many constitutions and asked how different governments worked in practice. In *Politics*, he argued that a good political community aims at the common good, while governments serving only rulers' interests are corrupt. His approach encouraged later Western thinkers to classify governments and compare evidence before judging institutions. Yet his account of citizenship excluded many people, including women and enslaved people. That limit matters: his ideas about the common good influenced political thought, but his definition of who could share in civic life differed sharply from modern ideals of equal citizenship.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could Socrates' method challenge a city's confidence in a law, and what later practice does the passage connect to that method?

2. How does Plato's view of who should rule follow from his doubts about popular opinion?

3. How did Aristotle's way of studying government differ from Plato's approach to political truth?

4. Why does Aristotle's idea of the common good need criticism alongside recognition of its influence?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A town is considering replacing its public library with a paid members-only library. In one paragraph of 80 to 110 words, analyze how Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle might each examine the plan, then explain which approach you would use to decide and why.

ANSWER KEY

Who Decides Justice?

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.WC.7

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one key idea for each philosopher and circle a later influence connected to each idea. Write 1 beside two claims that show a difference between philosophers. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could Socrates' method challenge a city's confidence in a law, and what later practice does the passage connect to that method?	**He would question what the city's claims mean and test whether its examples support them. The passage connects this method to later Western traditions of debate.**
2	How does Plato's view of who should rule follow from his doubts about popular opinion?	**Because he did not consider popularity a reliable guide to truth, Plato favored rulers trained to understand what is good over those who merely win approval.**
3	How did Aristotle's way of studying government differ from Plato's approach to political truth?	**Aristotle studied constitutions and compared how governments worked in practice. Plato emphasized reasoning about stable truths beyond the changing things people observe.**
4	Why does Aristotle's idea of the common good need criticism alongside recognition of its influence?	**His idea influenced later thinking about government, but his account of citizenship excluded women and enslaved people from civic life.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Socrates might ask what residents mean by a fair library and whether charging fees fits that definition. Plato might question whether popularity alone makes the plan wise and ask leaders to reason about what is good for the town. Aristotle might compare how free and paid libraries serve residents, then ask whether the change benefits the whole community or mainly those who can pay. I would use Aristotle's approach because checking the effects on different residents tests the town's claim to serve the common good. His narrow view of citizenship, however, should not limit whose needs the town counts.

Accept other interpretations grounded in the passage. For Part 3, look for a distinct approach for each philosopher and a reasoned choice, not a claim that any philosopher addressed modern libraries.