Power in Rome

Read how the Roman Republic shared power and shaped later democratic ideas.

9-12.WC.8 "Describe the government of the Roman Republic and its contribution to the development of modern democratic principles including, but not limited to separation of powers, rule of law, representative government, and civic duty."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail that shows each idea, then label your underlines 1 for divided authority, 2 for public law, 3 for elected leadership, and 4 for civic duty.

Who Held Power in the Roman Republic?

1. Imagine a Roman citizen watching an election in the Forum around 200 BCE. The Roman Republic did not have a king. Citizens voted in assemblies that elected officials, including two consuls who led armies and directed government business. Each consul could block the other's actions, and their terms lasted one year. The Senate, made up largely of former officials from wealthy families, advised leaders and strongly influenced policy. Assemblies also voted on laws. Power was divided among these bodies, though the division was not the same as the three branches of a modern government.

2. A dispute over a debt might send a citizen looking for a known rule rather than a ruler's personal command. In the fifth century BCE, Romans displayed the Twelve Tables, an early written collection of laws, in public. Written rules made it harder for powerful people to claim that the law meant whatever they wished. Magistrates and courts still interpreted rules, and status shaped how people were treated. Plebeians, or common citizens, won tribunes who could block actions by officials that harmed them. These protections did not give everyone equal rights, but they offered ways to challenge unchecked power.

3. Republican government also depended on civic duty. Eligible citizens could take part in elections and assemblies, serve in the army, or hold public office. Participation helped keep political decisions from resting only with one leader. Yet Roman citizenship was unequal: women could not vote or hold office, enslaved people had no political rights, and wealth gave some voters greater influence. Modern democracies did not copy the republic exactly. They developed broader voting rights while drawing on Roman examples of elected officials, limits on officials, publicly known laws, and the expectation that citizens take part in public life.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the two consuls limit each other's power? Name one other part of the government that shared power with them.

2. How did displaying the Twelve Tables support the rule of law? What limitation does the passage identify?

3. How did citizens choose leaders in the republic, and why was this not equal representation for everyone?

4. Name two ways citizens could carry out civic duty. How could participation affect who made political decisions?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Your school is changing a rule. In a five- to six-sentence paragraph, propose a way to make that decision using two ideas from the Roman Republic, but avoid one limit on participation described in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Power in Rome

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.WC.8

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail that shows each idea, then label your underlines 1 for divided authority, 2 for public law, 3 for elected leadership, and 4 for civic duty. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the two consuls limit each other's power? Name one other part of the government that shared power with them.	**Each consul could block the other's actions. The Senate or the assemblies also shared power with the consuls.**
2	How did displaying the Twelve Tables support the rule of law? What limitation does the passage identify?	**Public written rules made it harder for powerful people to claim the law meant whatever they wished. Magistrates and courts still interpreted the rules, and status affected people's treatment.**
3	How did citizens choose leaders in the republic, and why was this not equal representation for everyone?	**Citizens voted in assemblies that elected officials. Women could not vote or hold office, enslaved people had no political rights, and wealth gave some voters greater influence.**
4	Name two ways citizens could carry out civic duty. How could participation affect who made political decisions?	**Citizens could participate in elections or assemblies, serve in the army, or hold office. Participation helped prevent decisions from resting only with one leader.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our student council will post proposed rules where every student can read them. This uses the Roman idea of publicly known laws. Each grade will elect a council member to speak for its students. The principal and the council must both approve a change, so neither can decide alone. Unlike in Rome, every student, regardless of gender or family wealth, can vote for a representative. Students can also attend meetings and explain how a proposed rule would affect them.

Accept proposals that accurately apply two distinct republican ideas and explicitly avoid a participation limit identified in the passage. For the Twelve Tables question, distinguish making laws publicly known from preventing anyone from changing them.