Votes Across Time

Trace an ancient idea in modern government

6.C.2 "Explain how the elements and foundations of Greek direct democracy can be found in modern systems of government."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail about voting and one about who could participate in Athens, then circle a matching or contrasting modern detail for each and number the two pairs 1 and 2.

Who Gets to Decide?

1. Imagine a crowded meeting place in ancient Athens. In the 400s BCE, eligible citizens could gather at the Assembly to debate and vote on public decisions, such as whether to spend money on ships. They did not choose lawmakers to cast those votes for them. This was direct democracy: citizens took part in decisions themselves. But the word citizens had a narrow meaning. Only adult men with Athenian citizenship could join the Assembly. Women, enslaved people, and foreign residents were left out.

2. Today, some towns in the United States still hold open town meetings. Eligible local voters gather, discuss proposals, and vote on issues such as a town budget. Like Athenian citizens at the Assembly, these voters make some decisions themselves instead of leaving every choice to elected officials. The rules for who may vote have changed: eligible women as well as men can vote. People must also meet rules about age and where they live. Still, not every resident can vote, including children and many people who are not citizens.

3. A second link appears on a ballot. In some U.S. states, voters can approve or reject a proposed law through a ballot measure. They vote on the proposal itself, not only on the people who would make laws. That resembles the Assembly's direct vote, although modern voters usually cast private ballots rather than stand together in one meeting. Most decisions in the United States are made by elected representatives. Town meetings and ballot measures show how the older idea of citizens deciding issues directly still has a place alongside representative government.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does a town meeting carry on an idea from the Athenian Assembly?

2. How is voting on a proposed state law through a ballot measure like voting in the Athenian Assembly? Name one difference, too.

3. How do modern voting rules show that a practice can come from Athens without staying exactly the same?

4. Why would it be inaccurate to call the entire modern U.S. system a direct democracy, even though it has links to Athens?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Your school club must choose how to spend its money. In 3 or 4 sentences, invent two ways the club could decide: one modeled on Athenian direct voting and one using elected representatives. Explain who could take part and one way your direct vote would differ from voting in ancient Athens.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail about voting and one about who could participate in Athens, then circle a matching or contrasting modern detail for each and number the two pairs 1 and 2. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does a town meeting carry on an idea from the Athenian Assembly?	**At both, eligible voters discuss issues and vote on decisions themselves instead of leaving every choice to elected officials.**
2	How is voting on a proposed state law through a ballot measure like voting in the Athenian Assembly? Name one difference, too.	**In both cases, voters decide an issue directly. Modern voters usually cast private ballots, while Athenian citizens gathered at the Assembly.**
3	How do modern voting rules show that a practice can come from Athens without staying exactly the same?	**Direct voting continues, but eligible women and men can vote today. Only adult men with Athenian citizenship could join the Assembly.**
4	Why would it be inaccurate to call the entire modern U.S. system a direct democracy, even though it has links to Athens?	**Most U.S. decisions are made by elected representatives. Town meetings and ballot measures are examples of direct voting within that system.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our club must choose whether to spend its money on a garden or a reading corner. Every club member could discuss the choices and vote directly, much as eligible Athenians voted in the Assembly. Or members could elect two leaders to make the choice for them. Unlike in Athens, our direct vote would include every club member, regardless of gender.

Accept other accurate links between direct voting in Athens and the modern practices named in the passage. For Part 3, look for two distinct decision methods, a clear participation rule, and an accurate difference from Athens.