Power Has Limits

Read how constitutional principles protect individual rights.

USG.1.6 "Define and provide historical and contemporary examples of constitutionalism, rule of law, limited government, and popular sovereignty in the United States Constitution..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each principle and its meaning, circle an example of each, and number the four ways rights are protected in the passage.

Who Holds the Power?

1 In 1788, states ratified the Constitution, approving a government based on a written, higher law. Constitutionalism means officials must follow the Constitution, even when another choice seems easier. Today, courts can strike down laws that violate it, protecting people from unconstitutional government action. The Constitution also begins "We the People." Popular sovereignty means the people are the source of government power. Voters choose representatives in regular elections, giving people a way to replace leaders who threaten their rights.

2 In 1974, the Supreme Court ordered President Richard Nixon to release recordings sought for a criminal trial. The Court rejected his claim that presidential privilege was absolute. This illustrates the rule of law: public officials, including presidents, must obey the law and lawful court orders. The ruling protected the legal process from a president's interference. Today, an official who loses a lawsuit must still follow the court's order. Otherwise, powerful people could ignore legal protections that everyone else depends on.

3 Limited government means federal officials exercise powers granted by the Constitution and face limits on how they use those powers. In 1791, the Bill of Rights added explicit limits, including the First Amendment's protection of peaceful assembly. Today, officials cannot prohibit a peaceful protest simply because they dislike its message. Together, these principles protect individual rights in different ways: a written Constitution sets boundaries, elections give people a voice, courts require obedience to law, and limits on power leave space for personal freedom.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What is constitutionalism, and how can courts use it to protect rights today?

2. What is popular sovereignty, and how can elections help protect rights?

3. How did the Nixon ruling show the rule of law and protect the legal process?

4. How did the Bill of Rights limit government in 1791, and how does that limit apply to protests today?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A city council bans a peaceful rally because its members dislike the rally's message. In three or four sentences, apply two constitutional principles to explain why the ban should be challenged, and include one historical example from the passage.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each principle and its meaning, circle an example of each, and number the four ways rights are protected in the passage. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What is constitutionalism, and how can courts use it to protect rights today?	**Officials must follow the Constitution. Courts can strike down laws that violate it.**
2	What is popular sovereignty, and how can elections help protect rights?	**The people are the source of government power. Elections let voters replace leaders who threaten their rights.**
3	How did the Nixon ruling show the rule of law and protect the legal process?	**The Court required Nixon to release recordings for a criminal trial, showing that even a president must obey lawful court orders.**
4	How did the Bill of Rights limit government in 1791, and how does that limit apply to protests today?	**The Bill of Rights protected peaceful assembly. Officials cannot ban a peaceful protest simply because they dislike its message.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Limited government means officials cannot silence a peaceful rally just because they dislike its message. The First Amendment, added with the Bill of Rights in 1791, protects peaceful assembly. Constitutionalism means the council must follow the Constitution rather than its own preferences. A court could strike down the ban and protect the protesters' right to assemble.

Accept other accurate pairs of principles if the response applies both to the rally, explains the protection of rights, and includes a historical example from the passage.