Who Makes It Happen?

Trace four features of U.S. government through one school-water plan.

USG.3.1 "Analyze the United States Constitution, and explain characteristics of government in the United States, which define it as a federal, presidential, constitutional, and representative democracy."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one passage detail that shows each of the four features of U.S. government, then label each detail F for federal, P for presidential, C for constitutional, or R for representative.

Who Can Fix the Fountains?

1. Imagine a town discovers lead in several school drinking fountains. Families want safe water, but which government can act? The Constitution divides power between the national government and the states. State and local officials usually run public schools and can replace fountains under state rules. Congress, meanwhile, may use its constitutional power to spend for the general welfare to offer states money for safer school water. A state could accept a grant and follow its conditions or rely on its own funding. This shared work shows federalism: each level has responsibilities rather than one level controlling every decision.

2. Suppose Congress debates a bill offering those grants. Voters choose members of the House and Senate to speak and vote for them, rather than voting on every bill themselves. Residents might ask their lawmakers to fund repairs or question the cost. If Congress passes the bill and the president signs it, executive agencies can administer the program under the law. The president leads the executive branch but cannot simply vote as a member of Congress or create a new spending law alone. This arrangement is presidential: the elected president heads a separate executive branch, not a cabinet chosen from Congress.

3. Now imagine a grant condition requires schools to punish students who criticize the water program. A family challenges the condition in court. Judges could examine whether the rule violates the First Amendment's protection of speech. A court could block that condition even if many voters favor the grant program. A constitutional democracy limits government power with higher law while allowing people to influence policy through elections. In this case, the four features work together: state and national roles, a separately elected executive, constitutional limits, and lawmakers accountable to voters. Popular support alone cannot make a rule constitutional.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the school-water plan show federalism rather than national control of schools?

2. Why does the bill's path from Congress to executive agencies show a presidential system?

3. If many voters support the rule punishing criticism, why could a court still block it?

4. How can residents shape the grant plan without voting on the bill themselves, and what feature of government does this show?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A city wants to reduce smoke from its buses. In five or six sentences, propose a plan that shows how state or local officials, Congress, the president, and voters' elected lawmakers could each affect it, then explain one constitutional limit on the plan.

ANSWER KEY

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one passage detail that shows each of the four features of U.S. government, then label each detail F for federal, P for presidential, C for constitutional, or R for representative. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the school-water plan show federalism rather than national control of schools?	**State and local officials run schools and can replace fountains, while Congress can offer states grants that they may choose to accept.**
2	Why does the bill's path from Congress to executive agencies show a presidential system?	**Congress passes the spending law, while the president leads a separate executive branch whose agencies carry it out.**
3	If many voters support the rule punishing criticism, why could a court still block it?	**Popular support does not override the Constitution. A court could block the rule for violating the First Amendment's protection of speech.**
4	How can residents shape the grant plan without voting on the bill themselves, and what feature of government does this show?	**Residents can elect members of Congress and ask them to support or change the bill. This shows representative democracy.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

To cut bus fumes, the city could replace old buses and set local routes. Congress could fund cleaner buses through a grant that cities may choose to accept. The president could direct an executive agency to carry out the grant law, but could not pass that law alone. Residents could elect members of Congress who support the funding and ask them to change its terms. The city could not deny bus service to riders because of their race, since the Fourteenth Amendment requires equal protection. Together, these choices show federal, presidential, representative, and constitutional democracy.

Accept other plausible bus plans that distinguish state or local authority from congressional action and the president's executive role. The constitutional limit must identify a restriction on government action, not merely a policy preference.