A Town Decides

How town meetings shaped local decisions in colonial New England

5.C.1.9.B "self-government through town meetings"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two decisions the town meeting could make, and circle two ways eligible voters helped make decisions.

The Road to the Mill

1. In a New England town in the 1700s, the road to the mill was full of deep ruts. Neighbors could bring the problem to a town meeting, where eligible voters gathered to handle town business. A meeting notice told them when to come and what they would discuss. Instead of waiting for a distant official to fix the road, townspeople could make a local decision together.

2. At the meeting, someone might suggest paying workers to repair the road. Another voter might ask how much the work would cost. Eligible voters discussed the plan, then voted on whether to raise local taxes to pay for it. They could also choose town officers, such as a person to oversee road repairs. The officers carried out decisions the meeting had made.

3. Town meetings were a form of self-government because local voters had a voice in choosing how to spend town money. Yet not every resident had that voice. Voting rules changed by place and time, but women and some men were barred from voting in colonial town meetings. People who could not vote still lived with the meeting's choices, including any taxes or road changes.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which two choices in the passage show that voters controlled town business?

2. How could a voter help shape the road plan before the vote?

3. How would a town officer help after voters made a decision about the road?

4. What kept this form of self-government from giving every resident a voice?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a New England town in the 1700s needs to repair a public well. In four sentences, explain what voters could discuss and decide at a town meeting, who could carry out their choice, and one limit on who could vote.

ANSWER KEY

A Town Decides

GRADE 5 · 5.C.1.9.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two decisions the town meeting could make, and circle two ways eligible voters helped make decisions. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which two choices in the passage show that voters controlled town business?	**Voters could decide whether to raise local taxes for road repairs and choose town officers.**
2	How could a voter help shape the road plan before the vote?	**A voter could suggest paying workers to repair the road or ask how much the work would cost.**
3	How would a town officer help after voters made a decision about the road?	**The officer could oversee the road repairs and carry out the meeting's decision.**
4	What kept this form of self-government from giving every resident a voice?	**Women and some men were barred from voting, although they lived with the meeting's decisions.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Voters could discuss how much it would cost to repair the public well. They could vote to use town money to pay for the work. A town officer could arrange for workers to fix the well. Women could not vote in colonial town meetings, even though they used the well.

Accept other passage-based choices and ways voters participated. For Your Turn, look for discussion, a vote on a local decision, someone carrying it out, and a historically accurate limit on voting.