Who Gets a Voice?

How colonial institutions shaped representative government

5.C.2.4.B "Describe how representative government was established through various institutions (e.g., New England town hall meetings, colonial legislatures, colonial charters)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the names of three governing institutions. Circle details that show how each one shaped who could take part in government.

A Voice in Colonial Government

1. Before colonists could make local decisions, they needed a way to organize a colony. In 1606, England's king granted a charter to the Virginia Company. A charter was a written grant that let the company start a colony and set up its government. The charter gave the company authority to govern, but it did not give every person living in Virginia a vote.

2. In 1619, Virginia's first elected assembly met. Several settlements chose men called burgesses to speak for them. These representatives joined other colonial leaders to discuss laws for the colony. This was a colonial legislature, a group that helped make laws. Instead of bringing all eligible voters into one room, the settlements sent representatives to speak for them.

3. In many New England towns, eligible voters met in a town meeting to decide local matters, such as road repairs. Instead of sending representatives to speak for them, these voters could speak and vote in person. Both the town meeting and Virginia's assembly gave some colonists a voice. But voting rules shut out women, enslaved people, and many men without property.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Virginia Company's charter help establish a government, even though it did not give everyone a vote?

2. How did Virginia's colonial legislature give some settlements a voice in making laws?

3. How did New England town meetings let eligible voters help govern their towns?

4. Why was the government described in the passage only partly representative?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a new colonial town needs to care for a shared bridge. In four sentences, describe a different part a charter, a town meeting, and a colonial legislature could each play in governing, then explain whose voices the voting rules in the passage would leave out.

ANSWER KEY

Who Gets a Voice?

GRADE 5 · 5.C.2.4.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the names of three governing institutions. Circle details that show how each one shaped who could take part in government. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Virginia Company's charter help establish a government, even though it did not give everyone a vote?	**It gave the company authority to start a colony and set up its government.**
2	How did Virginia's colonial legislature give some settlements a voice in making laws?	**Settlements chose burgesses to speak for them and discuss laws with other colonial leaders.**
3	How did New England town meetings let eligible voters help govern their towns?	**Eligible voters could speak and vote in person on local matters.**
4	Why was the government described in the passage only partly representative?	**Some settlements sent representatives, and some town voters voted in person, but women, enslaved people, and many men without property were shut out.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A charter from England could give a company the authority to organize the colony's government. At a town meeting, eligible voters could decide how to repair their shared bridge. Elected representatives in a colonial legislature could make a law about paying for bridges across the colony. Women, enslaved people, and many men without property would be left out of these votes.

Accept other plausible roles for each institution if the charter grants authority, eligible town voters decide a local matter in person, and elected representatives take part in colonial lawmaking. The response should identify people excluded by the voting rules in the passage.