Who Had a Voice?

Read how Athenians governed their city-state and who could take part.

7.C.6.2.A "Explain why the government of ancient Athens is considered the beginning of democratic government and examine Greek political concepts, including the "polis" or city-state, rule of law, liberty, civic participation and voting rights..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways citizens shaped decisions, circle one limit on participation, and number two sentences about written laws or rules to help you judge why Athens was an early democracy.

Decisions in Ancient Athens

1 In fifth-century BCE Athens, a citizen walking toward the hill called the Pnyx could hear neighbors arguing about a proposed law. Athens was a polis, or city-state, with its own government, laws, and surrounding farmland. Greek poleis made decisions for their own communities rather than obeying one government for all Greece. In Athens, the Assembly brought citizens together to debate and vote on public matters. This direct role in decisions is one reason historians call Athens an early democracy, a word meaning "rule by the people."

2 Still, "the people" did not mean everyone. Adult male citizens could speak and vote in the Assembly; women, enslaved people, and foreigners living in Athens could not. Citizens were also chosen by lot to serve on the Council of 500, which prepared business for the Assembly. Large juries of citizens decided court cases. These bodies gave citizens ways to take part in government, but they left most residents without political rights. Athenian liberty included the freedom of citizens to speak in public debates, not equal freedom for all residents.

3 Athenians expected public decisions to follow laws, not just a ruler's wishes. Written laws were displayed so citizens could know them, and courts applied laws in disputes. This was an early form of rule of law, though fairness was unequal. Athens did not have one single written constitution like many countries today. Its written laws and rules for bodies such as the Assembly shaped how government worked. Later written constitutions also state how government works and who may use its powers.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did being a polis allow Athens to make its own public decisions?

2. How did the Assembly and the Council of 500 give citizens different roles in government?

3. Why does the passage call Athens an early democracy but say its political rights were limited?

4. How did written laws support rule of law in Athens, and how were they different from a modern written constitution?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are helping design a new polis. In four sentences, describe two features you would use from Athens and one change you would make to voting rights, then explain how these choices would help people govern their community.

ANSWER KEY

Who Had a Voice?

GRADE 7 · 7.C.6.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways citizens shaped decisions, circle one limit on participation, and number two sentences about written laws or rules to help you judge why Athens was an early democracy. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did being a polis allow Athens to make its own public decisions?	**As a polis, Athens had its own government and laws. Its citizens could debate and vote on public matters instead of following one government for all Greece.**
2	How did the Assembly and the Council of 500 give citizens different roles in government?	**Citizens debated and voted in the Assembly. Citizens chosen for the Council of 500 prepared business for the Assembly.**
3	Why does the passage call Athens an early democracy but say its political rights were limited?	**Adult male citizens could speak and vote on public matters, but women, enslaved people, and foreigners living in Athens could not.**
4	How did written laws support rule of law in Athens, and how were they different from a modern written constitution?	**Displayed written laws let citizens know the laws that courts applied. Athens did not have one single written constitution; its written laws and rules for governing bodies shaped how government worked.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My new polis would have an assembly where citizens debate and vote on proposals. It would also display written laws so people can check whether leaders follow them. Unlike ancient Athens, every adult resident could vote. The assembly would give people a direct role in decisions, public laws would limit leaders' power, and broader voting rights would give more people a voice.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of Athenian participation and its limits. For the open task, look for two identifiable Athenian features, a clear change to voting rights, and an explanation of how the choices support self-government.