Who Gets a Voice?

Trace colonial practices into American political ideas

8.C.1.1.C "Examine how British colonial ideas and practices of self-government (e.g., town meetings and colonial legislatures) influenced American political thought."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one town-meeting practice and one assembly practice. Circle a later political idea each helped shape, then label each matching practice and idea with the same number.

From Local Decisions to New Governments

1. In a New England town in the 1700s, a road needed repairs. Rather than wait for a distant official to choose a plan, eligible residents gathered at a town meeting. They debated how to pay for the work and voted on local spending. This practice gave participants experience making public decisions face to face. Yet a town meeting did not speak for everyone: voting was often limited to men who met property or other requirements. Even with those limits, the meeting showed that some government decisions could begin with local people.

2. Colonists also practiced self-government through elected assemblies, such as Virginia's House of Burgesses. Voters chose representatives to speak for them, and assemblies debated local laws and taxes. A royal governor still had power, so an assembly did not rule alone. When governors asked for money, representatives could challenge their plans by controlling spending. This repeated struggle taught many colonists to expect a voice in taxation. Like town meetings, assemblies excluded many people from political power, including women, enslaved people, and many men without voting rights.

3. These experiences shaped arguments when Britain tried to tax the colonies without their elected representatives in Parliament. Many colonists argued that a tax was legitimate only if representatives chosen by the people affected had approved it. Town meetings offered a model of direct local participation; assemblies offered a model of elected representation and control over public money. After independence, Americans used elected legislatures in state governments and in the national government. Their new systems expanded some political choices but did not immediately end the exclusions that had marked colonial government.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How might voting on road spending at a town meeting have shaped colonists' ideas about who should make local decisions?

2. How did assemblies' control over spending support the idea that people should have a voice in taxation?

3. Why did Britain's taxes cause a conflict with an expectation colonists had developed through their assemblies?

4. How did governments after independence carry forward an assembly practice while also keeping a limit of colonial self-government?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a new state must decide how to pay for a bridge. In three or four sentences, propose a decision-making plan that uses one idea from town meetings and one from colonial assemblies, and explain how your plan would include people who were often left out.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.1.1.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one town-meeting practice and one assembly practice. Circle a later political idea each helped shape, then label each matching practice and idea with the same number. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How might voting on road spending at a town meeting have shaped colonists' ideas about who should make local decisions?	**It showed participants that local people, rather than only distant officials, could debate and decide how public money was spent.**
2	How did assemblies' control over spending support the idea that people should have a voice in taxation?	**Elected representatives could challenge a governor's plans for public money, giving voters a voice through the people they chose.**
3	Why did Britain's taxes cause a conflict with an expectation colonists had developed through their assemblies?	**Colonists had come to expect taxes to be approved by their elected representatives, but they had no elected representatives in Parliament.**
4	How did governments after independence carry forward an assembly practice while also keeping a limit of colonial self-government?	**They used elected legislatures, but they did not immediately end the exclusion of many people from political power.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Each town would hold a public meeting where residents debate the bridge and vote on a recommendation. Elected lawmakers would then decide whether to approve a tax, rather than let a governor set it alone. All adult residents could vote regardless of gender, race, or property. This plan combines local discussion with elected oversight while removing voting limits that excluded many colonists.

Accept other plans that clearly connect direct local participation and elected representation to a bridge-funding decision. The plan must also address an exclusion described in the passage.