Rules We Write

From the Mayflower Compact to the Constitution

8.C.4.1 "Analyze the need for a written constitution, tracing the foundation of self-government established in the Mayflower Compact, including its responsibilities to citizens as expressed in the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the problem that made the compact useful and one reason a written Constitution matters; circle one compact promise and two Preamble goals to trace how the purpose of self-government grew.

Putting Government in Writing

1 In November 1620, passengers aboard the Mayflower reached the coast of present-day Massachusetts, far north of their planned destination in Virginia. Some passengers argued that no one had authority to govern them there. Before going ashore, 41 adult men signed the Mayflower Compact. They agreed to form a "civil body politic" and make "just and equal laws" for the colony's "general good." They also promised to obey those laws. This written agreement gave the settlers a shared way to make decisions when the rules for their new location were uncertain.

2 The compact was a step toward self-government: its signers agreed that members of their own group would create rules for their community. But its idea of "the people" was limited. Women, children, and Indigenous peoples did not sign it, and the compact still declared loyalty to King James. A written agreement could settle a dispute about authority, yet the compact said little about how leaders would be chosen or how power would be limited. As the United States formed, its leaders faced a much larger version of that problem.

3 In 1787, delegates wrote the United States Constitution to establish a national government with defined powers and a process for making laws. Its Preamble begins "We the People" and names goals: a stronger union, justice, peace at home, defense, the general welfare, and liberty for present and future generations. These goals describe what government should work to provide for the people. Unlike the short compact, the Constitution lays out branches and limits on their power. Writing down both the government's structure and its purposes lets citizens judge whether their government is meeting its public responsibilities.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did the passengers need a written agreement when they reached Massachusetts, and how did the compact respond?

2. How did the compact establish self-government, and why did it not represent everyone in the community?

3. What weakness of the compact did the Constitution's written structure address?

4. Choose two Preamble goals from the passage. How does each show a responsibility of government to the people?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine several neighborhoods form a new town and disagree about who should set rules for a shared water supply. In four or five sentences, propose a written founding agreement that explains who makes decisions, who can take part, and two public goals; connect one choice to the compact and another to the Preamble.

ANSWER KEY

Rules We Write

GRADE 8 · 8.C.4.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the problem that made the compact useful and one reason a written Constitution matters; circle one compact promise and two Preamble goals to trace how the purpose of self-government grew. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did the passengers need a written agreement when they reached Massachusetts, and how did the compact respond?	**Some passengers questioned who had authority to govern at the unexpected location. The compact gave its signers a shared agreement to form a government, make laws, and obey them.**
2	How did the compact establish self-government, and why did it not represent everyone in the community?	**Its signers agreed that members of their group would make laws for the colony. Women, children, and Indigenous peoples did not sign it.**
3	What weakness of the compact did the Constitution's written structure address?	**The compact said little about choosing leaders or limiting power. The Constitution sets out branches of government and limits on their power.**
4	Choose two Preamble goals from the passage. How does each show a responsibility of government to the people?	**For example, justice calls on government to treat people fairly, while defense calls on it to protect the country. Accept other accurate explanations of two listed goals.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The town should write a charter that lets every adult resident vote for a council that sets water rules. Like the Mayflower Compact, the charter would require the community to follow rules made for the common good. Unlike the compact, it would include women among voters. The council would publish its decisions and face elections each year to limit its power. Its goals would be fair access to water and protection of public health, reflecting the Preamble's aims of justice and general welfare.

Accept different decision-making plans and public goals if the response explains who participates and makes clear connections to both documents. For question 4, look for an explanation of what government should do, not just a list of goals.