How Rights Became Law

Trace the two stages that added the Bill of Rights to the Constitution.

8.C.4.5.A "Explain the Constitutional amendment process, using the Bill of Rights as an example."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline how Congress proposed the Bill of Rights, circle how states ratified it, and label those stages 1 and 2 in the passage.

From Proposed Rights to Amendments

1. When the Constitution took effect in 1789, some Americans worried that it did not clearly protect freedoms such as speech and religion. Supporters of adding protections argued that a written promise mattered most if it became part of the nation's highest law. A regular law could be changed by Congress, but changing the Constitution required a harder process called an amendment. James Madison brought proposed protections to Congress. The goal was to set limits on federal power and make individual rights more secure.

2. Article V of the Constitution sets two stages for an amendment: proposal and ratification. Congress can propose an amendment when two thirds of both the House of Representatives and the Senate vote for it. Another route begins when two thirds of state legislatures ask Congress to call a convention to propose amendments. A proposal is not yet part of the Constitution. To become an amendment, three fourths of the states must ratify it, using state legislatures or state conventions, as Congress directs. This high bar requires wide agreement.

3. In 1789, Congress used the first proposal route and sent twelve proposed amendments to the states. States debated and voted on each proposal separately. By December 1791, enough states had ratified ten of them. Those ten became the Bill of Rights, including protections for speech, religion, and people accused of crimes. The other two did not become part of the Constitution at that time because they lacked the needed state approval. The story shows why a vote in Congress starts the change, but agreement among states finishes it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did supporters want protections added as amendments instead of relying on regular laws?

2. Using the route taken by the Bill of Rights, explain what Congress and the states each had to do.

3. How could states begin the other proposal route, and what would still need to happen before a proposal became an amendment?

4. Congress sent twelve proposals to the states. Why did only ten become the Bill of Rights in 1791?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a proposed amendment protecting access to public libraries. In four sentences, explain how it could become part of the Constitution using the route taken by the Bill of Rights, and what would happen if only half the states approved it.

ANSWER KEY

How Rights Became Law

GRADE 8 · 8.C.4.5.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline how Congress proposed the Bill of Rights, circle how states ratified it, and label those stages 1 and 2 in the passage. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did supporters want protections added as amendments instead of relying on regular laws?	**They wanted the protections in the Constitution, the nation's highest law. Congress can change a regular law.**
2	Using the route taken by the Bill of Rights, explain what Congress and the states each had to do.	**Two thirds of both the House and Senate had to vote to propose the amendments. Three fourths of the states then had to ratify each one.**
3	How could states begin the other proposal route, and what would still need to happen before a proposal became an amendment?	**Two thirds of state legislatures could ask Congress to call a convention to propose amendments. Three fourths of the states would still need to ratify a proposal.**
4	Congress sent twelve proposals to the states. Why did only ten become the Bill of Rights in 1791?	**Only ten received the required approval from three fourths of the states by 1791.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

First, two thirds of the House of Representatives and two thirds of the Senate would need to vote to propose the library amendment. Congress would then send the proposal to the states. Three fourths of the states would need to ratify it before it became part of the Constitution. If only half the states approved it, the proposal would not become an amendment.

Accept explanations that distinguish proposal from ratification and give the correct fractions. For the open task, students may describe ratification by state legislatures or state conventions.