When Laws Meet Resistance

The Whiskey Rebellion and the power to enforce federal law

8.C.5.1.B "Analyze the impact of the Whiskey Rebellion and the presidential authority to enforce federal law."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one reason farmers resisted the tax, circle two actions Washington took to enforce the law, and number two effects of the federal response.

A Tax Tests the New Government

1 In 1791, Congress placed a federal tax on distilled spirits, including whiskey, to help pay national debts. In western Pennsylvania, many farmers turned grain into whiskey because barrels were easier to carry over rough roads than sacks of grain. They saw the tax as unfair, especially when large producers could pay a lower rate per gallon. Some farmers petitioned against the tax, but others threatened or attacked tax collectors. The conflict raised a hard question for the new nation: Could people resist a law they disliked, and could the president make them obey it?

2 By 1794, resistance had grown violent. A crowd attacked the home of a tax official near Pittsburgh, and protesters gathered in large numbers. President George Washington warned them to disperse. When warnings failed, he called up state militias under the Militia Act, after a federal judge found that ordinary law enforcement could not stop the resistance. Washington joined the troops partway west. Most protesters scattered before the militia arrived, so the uprising ended with little fighting. The response showed that the federal government could turn its laws into action.

3 The militia arrested some suspects, but only two men were convicted of treason. Washington later pardoned both. His choices sent two messages: the government would enforce a law passed by Congress, but it could also show mercy after order returned. Critics worried that using troops against citizens might silence protest, while supporters said an elected government could not survive if groups blocked its laws by force. The Whiskey Rebellion established an early example of a president using lawful military power to enforce federal law, without settling arguments about when that power should be used.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did conditions in western Pennsylvania help turn the whiskey tax into a conflict over federal law?

2. Why did Washington call up militias instead of relying only on warnings or ordinary law enforcement? What did this action show about presidential authority?

3. Compare one immediate effect of the militia's march with one lasting effect of Washington's response.

4. How do the treason convictions and Washington's pardons together show two sides of his approach to enforcing federal law?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Part 3, Your Turn: Imagine you are a newspaper editor writing to readers after the militia's march. In 4 to 5 sentences, argue whether Washington's response strengthened or threatened the new republic, using two details from the passage and acknowledging one concern from the other side.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.5.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one reason farmers resisted the tax, circle two actions Washington took to enforce the law, and number two effects of the federal response. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did conditions in western Pennsylvania help turn the whiskey tax into a conflict over federal law?	**Farmers relied on turning grain into whiskey for transport, and they believed the tax favored large producers. Some went beyond petitioning and threatened or attacked tax collectors, making the law difficult to enforce.**
2	Why did Washington call up militias instead of relying only on warnings or ordinary law enforcement? What did this action show about presidential authority?	**Warnings failed, and a federal judge found that ordinary law enforcement could not stop the resistance. Under the Militia Act, Washington could call up state militias to enforce federal law.**
3	Compare one immediate effect of the militia's march with one lasting effect of Washington's response.	**Most protesters scattered, ending the uprising with little fighting. Washington's response set an early example of a president using lawful military power to enforce federal law.**
4	How do the treason convictions and Washington's pardons together show two sides of his approach to enforcing federal law?	**The convictions showed that violent resistance could have legal consequences. The pardons showed that Washington could enforce the law while showing mercy.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Washington's response strengthened the new republic because it showed that a law passed by Congress could be enforced. After protesters attacked a tax official's home, Washington warned them to disperse before calling up militias. Most protesters scattered, and the uprising ended with little fighting. Critics could argue that troops might silence citizens who disagree with a law. Still, Washington's later pardons suggest that enforcing the law did not require harsh punishment for everyone.

Accept either position in Part 3 if the argument uses two accurate passage details and acknowledges a concern from the opposing view. For the marking job, accept effects such as protesters scattering, the uprising ending, or the precedent for presidential enforcement.