Crown Under Constraints

How law and convention limit a monarch's power

MWH.C.3.1.E "Analyze government's source of authority under a constitutional monarchy by explaining how and why powers are limited by a written or unwritten constitution (e.g., English Parliament)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two limits set by written law and circle one limit set by unwritten convention. Number each mark to show which institution gives or withholds approval, so you can trace where the government's authority comes from.

A Crown With Conditions

1. In 1688, England's King James II fled after political leaders invited William of Orange to challenge him. Parliament then offered the crown to William and Mary in 1689. The offer was not a blank check. Parliament's Declaration of Rights, later enacted as the Bill of Rights, condemned James's attempts to suspend laws and raise money without Parliament's consent. A monarch still held the crown, but the law set conditions for using its power. This settlement made a central question unavoidable: if the ruler wanted money or a change in law, whose approval would make that action lawful?

2. Imagine the new monarch wants to collect a tax to pay soldiers. Under the Bill of Rights, the crown cannot levy taxes without a grant from Parliament. Keeping a standing army during peacetime also requires Parliament's consent. These limits give Parliament a practical check on royal plans, because soldiers need funding as well as orders. Members of the House of Commons were elected, though voting was restricted to a minority of the population. Authority was therefore shared rather than simply transferred to all the people: the monarch could govern, but could not make every major decision alone.

3. Britain today has no single written constitutional document. Its constitutional rules include written laws, such as the Bill of Rights, and unwritten conventions, or political practices treated as binding. The monarch formally appoints a prime minister, but convention directs the monarch to choose someone who can command the confidence of the elected House of Commons. Ministers exercise government powers in the crown's name, yet they must keep Parliament's support to govern. These limits exist to prevent a ruler from acting alone and to make government answerable to elected representatives, even though the monarch remains the head of state.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why could William and Mary not treat the crown as permission to change laws whenever they wished?

2. How did Parliament's powers over taxes and a peacetime standing army check a monarch's plans?

3. How was the House of Commons a source of authority for government, and what limit did the passage place on its claim to represent the people?

4. The monarch formally appoints a prime minister. What unwritten rule limits that choice, and why does it matter?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a government project not mentioned in the passage that would need a new tax. In four sentences, explain who would propose it, whose approval the tax needs under written law, how Commons support affects the ministers, and why these limits matter.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · MWH.C.3.1.E

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two limits set by written law and circle one limit set by unwritten convention. Number each mark to show which institution gives or withholds approval, so you can trace where the government's authority comes from. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why could William and Mary not treat the crown as permission to change laws whenever they wished?	**The Bill of Rights condemned the crown's suspension of laws without Parliament's consent. Holding the crown did not put the monarch above that legal limit.**
2	How did Parliament's powers over taxes and a peacetime standing army check a monarch's plans?	**The crown needed Parliament's grant to levy taxes and its consent to keep a peacetime standing army. Parliament could therefore block a plan that required money or soldiers.**
3	How was the House of Commons a source of authority for government, and what limit did the passage place on its claim to represent the people?	**Commons members were elected, and ministers needed the Commons' confidence to govern. Voting was restricted to a minority, so not everyone was represented through an equal vote.**
4	The monarch formally appoints a prime minister. What unwritten rule limits that choice, and why does it matter?	**Convention directs the monarch to choose someone who can command the elected Commons' confidence. This keeps the monarch from choosing a government that lacks that support.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Ministers propose building a national rail tunnel and paying for it with a new fuel tax. Under the Bill of Rights, Parliament must grant the tax rather than letting the monarch levy it alone. The ministers also need the confidence of the House of Commons to keep governing. These limits make the government seek representatives' support instead of collecting money on a ruler's orders.

Accept other original projects and taxes if the response correctly distinguishes Parliament's legal authority over taxation from the convention requiring Commons confidence. Students need not claim that everyone could vote in 1689.