Who Should Rule?

Enlightenment ideas about authority and limits on power

MWH.C.3.3.B "Describe the contributions of major Enlightenment thinkers (e.g., Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau), contrasting the views of Thomas Hobbes regarding the divine right theory."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline claims about where a ruler's authority comes from. Circle proposals for limiting or questioning a ruler's power so you can compare the thinkers.

A King Claims the Throne

1 Imagine a kingdom shaken by civil war. Its king says he must rule because God gave his family the throne. This is the divine right theory: a ruler's authority comes from God, not from the people. Thomas Hobbes also feared civil war, but he did not base political authority on divine right. In *Leviathan*, he argued that people authorize a powerful sovereign through a social contract to escape violent disorder. Hobbes thought subjects should usually obey that sovereign, even when they dislike its decisions, because a weak government could lead to conflict. They could still resist a direct threat to their lives.

2 John Locke challenged the idea that safety requires nearly unchecked rule. He argued that people have natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Government receives authority from the consent of the governed and exists to protect those rights. If it repeatedly violates them, the people may replace it. Like Hobbes, Locke used a social contract rather than divine right, but Locke set firmer limits on rulers. Montesquieu approached the problem through the design of government. He proposed separating legislative, executive, and judicial powers so each could check the others. A single ruler holding all three powers invited abuse.

3 Now imagine the king orders a writer jailed for criticizing a tax and announces that only he can decide what the nation wants. Voltaire attacked religious intolerance and defended freedom to express ideas, especially against censorship and persecution. He would object to punishing criticism, even if a ruler claimed to preserve order. Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that legitimate laws express the general will of the citizens, aimed at the common good. He did not mean that a king simply guesses what everyone wants. These thinkers disagreed about how to govern, but each offered a reason to question a ruler's unchecked power.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Hobbes explain a ruler's authority differently from the king's divine right claim?

2. How did Locke's view of a ruler who violates people's rights differ from Hobbes's view of obedience?

3. How would Montesquieu's plan guard against a danger that Hobbes focused on less than disorder?

4. How would Voltaire and Rousseau challenge the king's actions in the last paragraph? Give one idea from each thinker.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A fictional mayor says, “God chose me to rule, so I will close the city council and ban public criticism to prevent unrest.” Write one paragraph explaining how Hobbes would assess the mayor's claim to authority, then use two other thinkers from the passage to evaluate the mayor's actions. Name each thinker's idea.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · MWH.C.3.3.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline claims about where a ruler's authority comes from. Circle proposals for limiting or questioning a ruler's power so you can compare the thinkers. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Hobbes explain a ruler's authority differently from the king's divine right claim?	**The king claimed authority from God. Hobbes argued that people authorize a powerful sovereign through a social contract to escape disorder.**
2	How did Locke's view of a ruler who violates people's rights differ from Hobbes's view of obedience?	**Locke said people may replace a government that repeatedly violates their rights. Hobbes thought subjects should usually obey a strong sovereign to avoid conflict.**
3	How would Montesquieu's plan guard against a danger that Hobbes focused on less than disorder?	**Montesquieu would separate legislative, executive, and judicial powers so they could check one another and prevent abuse. Hobbes emphasized a powerful sovereign to prevent disorder.**
4	How would Voltaire and Rousseau challenge the king's actions in the last paragraph? Give one idea from each thinker.	**Voltaire would object to jailing a writer for criticism because he defended expression against censorship. Rousseau would reject the king's claim to decide alone what the nation wants because citizens hold sovereignty together.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Hobbes would reject the mayor's claim that God alone gives him authority. Hobbes tied a powerful ruler's authority to people's agreement for safety, so a promise to prevent unrest would not prove this mayor's right to rule. Montesquieu would object to closing the council because it concentrates power instead of separating government powers. Voltaire would object to banning criticism because he defended expression against censorship. These ideas show that a promise of order does not settle whether a ruler's power is legitimate or wisely limited.

Accept other accurate pairs of thinkers in the open response if each is tied to a distinct action or claim by the mayor. Students should distinguish Hobbes's support for strong authority from the divine right theory.