Across the Curtain

Compare the systems that divided postwar Europe

MWH.C.7.1.B "Compare the ideological, political, and economic distinctions between the United States of America and Western bloc versus the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the Eastern bloc..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details about the Western bloc and circle details about the Eastern bloc. Label one matched contrast in politics P, one in economics E, and one in alliances A.

A Divided City, a Divided Europe

1 In 1948, a family in Berlin could watch planes bring food and coal into the western sectors of their city. Soviet authorities had blocked road and rail access to those sectors, hoping the Western powers would leave. Instead, the United States and Britain supplied West Berlin by air. Berlin lay inside the Soviet occupation zone of Germany, yet the city itself was divided among the victorious Allied powers. The airlift made a larger struggle visible: countries that had fought Nazi Germany together now disagreed about who should govern, how economies should work, and what freedom meant.

2 The United States and its Western European allies generally defended multiparty elections, civil liberties, and private ownership, although Western governments also regulated businesses and funded public services. Their leaders argued that citizens should be able to choose and replace governments. In the Soviet Union and the states it dominated in Eastern Europe, communist parties held power without genuinely competitive elections. Soviet leaders said a socialist system would end class inequality, but the state controlled major industries and directed much of the economy. Eastern bloc governments limited political opposition and press freedom. These differences shaped alliances as well as daily choices.

3 After World War II, Soviet forces remained in much of Eastern Europe, where Moscow backed governments loyal to it. Western European states increasingly aligned with the United States, accepting American economic aid through the Marshall Plan, with many later joining NATO. In 1949, the Western occupation zones became West Germany, and Soviet-backed authorities established East Germany months later. Winston Churchill had called the growing division an "Iron Curtain," a metaphor for the barriers separating the blocs. Borders, travel controls, and censorship made that divide real. The contrast was not absolute: Western countries differed from one another, and people on both sides wanted security and recovery.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What different goals did Western leaders and Soviet leaders emphasize when defending their systems?

2. Compare how citizens could challenge their governments in the two blocs.

3. Compare the roles of private owners and the state in each bloc's economy.

4. How did ties to outside powers help divide Europe? Give one example from each bloc.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a newspaper editor in 1949. Write a 75 to 95 word editorial note explaining why removing border guards alone would not end Europe's division; compare each bloc's politics and economy, and identify one other obstacle described in the passage.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details about the Western bloc and circle details about the Eastern bloc. Label one matched contrast in politics P, one in economics E, and one in alliances A. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What different goals did Western leaders and Soviet leaders emphasize when defending their systems?	**Western leaders emphasized citizens' ability to choose and replace governments. Soviet leaders said socialism would end class inequality.**
2	Compare how citizens could challenge their governments in the two blocs.	**The Western bloc generally supported multiparty elections and civil liberties. Eastern bloc governments lacked genuinely competitive elections and limited opposition and press freedom.**
3	Compare the roles of private owners and the state in each bloc's economy.	**Western economies generally allowed private ownership, with government regulation and public services. In the Eastern bloc, the state controlled major industries and directed much of the economy.**
4	How did ties to outside powers help divide Europe? Give one example from each bloc.	**Western European states aligned with the United States, for example by accepting Marshall Plan aid. Soviet forces remained in much of Eastern Europe, where Moscow backed loyal governments.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Removing border guards would not erase the Iron Curtain. In the Western bloc, leaders support competitive elections and private ownership, though governments also regulate businesses. In the Eastern bloc, communist parties hold power without genuine competition, and the state directs major industries. These differences shape how people vote and work. Censorship is another obstacle: Eastern bloc governments limit press freedom, so people cannot freely debate policies even if they can cross a border. Europe will remain divided unless its governments address these deeper differences, not just its guarded boundaries.

Accept equivalent comparisons grounded in the passage. For the editorial note, look for accurate contrasts in both politics and economics and a distinct obstacle, such as censorship or opposing alliances.