Rules and Relief

Read Marx's claims about power, faith, and individual freedom.

TOT.C.1.4 "Describe Marxist claims related to the individual and religion, by examining the idea that law and morality are mere "bourgeois prejudices" and religion an "opiate of the masses.""

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the claim about whose interests law and morality may serve, circle two statements that show both sides of Marx's view of religion, and number two sentences that connect work conditions to individual freedom.

A Worker's Choices

1. Imagine an 1840s textile mill where workers face long hours and dangerous machines. The owner follows a law that lets him dismiss workers who refuse unsafe tasks. A notice calls obedience a moral duty and demands gratitude for any wage. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels argued that society's rules often reflect the interests of the class that controls wealth. In *The Communist Manifesto*, they described law and morality as "bourgeois prejudices" from a worker's point of view. "Bourgeois" refers to owners of capital, not simply anyone with money. Their point was not that every rule is useless, but that claims of fairness can hide unequal power.

2. After a difficult shift, a worker might visit a chapel for comfort and community. Marx understood why people facing hardship turn to faith. He called religion the "opium of the people," often paraphrased as an "opiate of the masses." In his time, opium was used to ease pain, so the comparison points to real relief. Marx also argued that a promise of happiness beyond this life could discourage people from challenging conditions that cause suffering now. He did not claim that every believer sides with owners. His criticism focused on how religion can soothe distress without removing its social causes.

3. These arguments shape Marx's view of the individual. A person makes choices, but those choices occur within work and property arrangements that the person did not create alone. The mill worker can obey, protest, or seek another job, yet the risk of losing income limits those options. Marx thought workers acting together could change the conditions that restrict their lives. He saw genuine freedom as more than being told to work hard or endure pain. It would include greater control over work and access to what people need to develop their abilities. His claims criticize social systems, not the dignity of individual believers or workers.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might Marx call the mill's dismissal law a "bourgeois prejudice" rather than a fair rule?

2. How might Marx challenge the notice's claim that obedience and gratitude are moral duties?

3. How does the comparison to opium describe both a benefit and a possible effect of religion?

4. How does the mill worker's situation support Marx's claim about individual freedom?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a city rule lets delivery companies deny benefits to contractors. One company praises workers who never complain and offers a voluntary prayer gathering after shifts. In 5 to 6 sentences, explain how Marx might view the rule, the praise, and the gathering, then describe what changing work conditions could mean for workers as individuals. Do not assume that every believer supports the company.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the claim about whose interests law and morality may serve, circle two statements that show both sides of Marx's view of religion, and number two sentences that connect work conditions to individual freedom. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might Marx call the mill's dismissal law a "bourgeois prejudice" rather than a fair rule?	**The law lets the owner dismiss workers who refuse unsafe tasks. Marx might argue that it protects the owner's interests while appearing to be a fair rule.**
2	How might Marx challenge the notice's claim that obedience and gratitude are moral duties?	**He might argue that calling obedience and gratitude duties makes acceptance of the owner's power seem morally right, even when workers face unsafe conditions.**
3	How does the comparison to opium describe both a benefit and a possible effect of religion?	**Religion can offer real comfort and community to people in hardship. Marx also argued that its promise of future happiness could discourage people from challenging the conditions causing their suffering.**
4	How does the mill worker's situation support Marx's claim about individual freedom?	**The worker can choose to obey, protest, or leave, but the need for income limits those choices. Marx thought changing work conditions together could give workers greater control over their lives.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Marx might argue that the city rule serves company owners because it lets them avoid paying benefits. He might question the praise for workers who never complain, since it makes acceptance of unequal treatment seem like a virtue. The voluntary prayer gathering could give tired workers real comfort and community. Yet he might warn that comfort alone cannot replace better conditions, without assuming that believers oppose change. If workers acted together to change the rule and their work, they could gain more control over their lives.

Accept answers that explain Marx's claims as critiques of how social conditions can serve owners and limit workers' choices. Do not require students to claim that all laws are unfair or that religion offers no real comfort.