Rights Into Action

Compare how constitutional principles shape public policy.

TOT.P.2.1 "Demonstrate an understanding of the principles of government, the benefits of democratic systems, and their responsibilities as citizens..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one constitutional principle from each country, circle what each court decided, and number two actions needed to turn a ruling into policy.

When a Right Meets a Policy

1. In 1868, the United States adopted the Fourteenth Amendment. It requires states to give people equal protection of the laws. Yet many states continued to require separate public schools for Black and white children. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that racial segregation in public schools violated equal protection. The ruling did not instantly integrate every school; officials still had to change policies, and citizens pressed them to act. Here, a constitutional principle gave a court grounds to challenge a state policy, but making the decision real required action beyond the courtroom.

2. South Africa's 1996 Constitution emerged after the end of apartheid, a system that denied the country's Black majority political rights. It protects access to adequate housing and requires the state to take reasonable steps, within available resources, toward realizing that right. In the 2000 Grootboom case, the Constitutional Court found that a government housing program failed to address people in desperate need. The court required the government to develop and carry out a reasonable plan, not to provide each person a house immediately. Unlike a guarantee of an instant result, this right creates a duty that courts can review.

3. Both constitutions limit government, but the cases show different routes from principle to policy. In Brown, judges used a rule against unequal treatment to reject school segregation by states. In Grootboom, judges tested whether government had a reasonable plan to expand access to housing. Neither court could carry out the policy alone. School officials, housing agencies, and lawmakers had to make decisions about budgets and enforcement. Citizens could attend public meetings, question those decisions, and organize for change. The examples show how constitutional duties and court powers can reshape public policy over time, while democratic participation helps determine whether those changes reach people.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Fourteenth Amendment allow the Supreme Court to challenge a state school policy in Brown?

2. How did South Africa's Constitution shape the court's review of the housing program in Grootboom?

3. Compare what the courts rejected or required in the two cases. Why did government officials still need to act?

4. What change in government's responsibilities over time does each case illustrate? How could citizens help make one change effective?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine officials in South Africa propose a housing plan that leaves out families in desperate need and gives Black residents fewer options than other residents. Write one paragraph using both cases to evaluate the plan, explain one limit of applying Brown here, and propose one action citizens could take.

Rights Into Action

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one constitutional principle from each country, circle what each court decided, and number two actions needed to turn a ruling into policy. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Fourteenth Amendment allow the Supreme Court to challenge a state school policy in Brown?	**Its equal protection requirement gave the Court grounds to rule that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.**
2	How did South Africa's Constitution shape the court's review of the housing program in Grootboom?	**The Constitution required reasonable steps toward access to adequate housing. The court found that the program failed to address people in desperate need.**
3	Compare what the courts rejected or required in the two cases. Why did government officials still need to act?	**Brown rejected racial segregation in public schools; Grootboom required a reasonable housing plan that addressed people in desperate need. Officials still had to change school policies or develop and carry out the housing plan.**
4	What change in government's responsibilities over time does each case illustrate? How could citizens help make one change effective?	**Brown applied the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection rule to state school segregation decades after its adoption. Grootboom applied South Africa's housing right to a government program after the 1996 Constitution took effect. Citizens could attend meetings, question officials, or organize for change.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The proposed plan echoes Grootboom because it overlooks families in desperate need. Residents could ask whether officials have a reasonable plan to include them. Brown raises a different concern: officials should examine why Black residents would receive fewer housing options. Brown is a United States school case, not a South African housing ruling, so it does not directly decide this dispute. Residents could bring evidence to a public meeting and ask officials to revise the plan.

Accept comparisons that distinguish Brown's equal protection ruling from Grootboom's requirement for a reasonable housing plan. Part 3 should apply both cases to the new plan without claiming that Brown controls South African housing policy.