Who Holds Power?

Trace where government authority begins and how it stays accountable.

USG.C.1.3.A "Explain the principle of popular sovereignty which asserts that governments are created and sustained by the consent of the people who are the legitimate source of all political authority."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline a sentence showing where the council gets its authority, circle two ways residents can hold it accountable, and box one limit on its power.

The Bridge Decision

1. When a river floods the road into Harbor City, its council must decide whether to fund a new bridge. The council members do not own the city, and their power does not come from being richer or louder than their neighbors. Residents eligible to vote chose them in an election held under rules the public can challenge and change. Voters trusted these representatives to make public decisions for a limited term. People who did not vote for the winners remain members of the political community. Their disagreement does not automatically erase the council's authority.

2. At a public meeting, engineers describe the bridge, and residents argue about a proposed tax to pay for it. The council votes to approve the tax, although many residents object. Consent of the governed does not mean every person agrees with every law. Instead, the public grants officials a temporary, accountable role through elections and legal procedures. Residents can speak against the tax, organize a petition, ask a court to review whether the decision follows the law, and choose different council members at the next election. These options keep authority answerable to the people between elections.

3. Suppose the council claims it may ban all criticism of the bridge tax. Winning an election would not give it that power. Constitutional protections for speech limit what officials can do, even when a majority supports their policy. The people are the legitimate source of government power, but they create rules that bind their representatives. A government maintained only by threats, with no meaningful way to question leaders or replace them, cannot claim ongoing consent simply because its leaders once won a vote. Popular sovereignty requires both an origin in the people's authority and ways to hold power accountable.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why may the council decide on a bridge tax even though council members do not own the city?

2. Many residents oppose the tax. Why does their disagreement alone not cancel the council's authority?

3. Name two actions residents can take after the tax vote. How do those actions keep the council answerable to the people?

4. Why would banning criticism of the tax conflict with the council's authority?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine residents are forming a new town council to make rules about shared water use. In four sentences, propose how the council will gain authority, how residents can hold it accountable, and why residents who lose a vote still have a voice.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.1.3.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline a sentence showing where the council gets its authority, circle two ways residents can hold it accountable, and box one limit on its power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why may the council decide on a bridge tax even though council members do not own the city?	**Eligible residents elected the council members and entrusted them with public decisions for a limited term.**
2	Many residents oppose the tax. Why does their disagreement alone not cancel the council's authority?	**Consent gives elected officials an accountable role through elections and legal procedures. It does not require everyone to agree with each decision.**
3	Name two actions residents can take after the tax vote. How do those actions keep the council answerable to the people?	**Residents can petition against the tax and elect different council members. These actions let them challenge a decision and change who holds power.**
4	Why would banning criticism of the tax conflict with the council's authority?	**The people give the council its authority under rules that protect speech. An election does not give officials power to silence the people they represent.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Residents could elect a water council for two-year terms under rules they approve. The council would hold public meetings before voting on water-use rules. Residents could petition for changes and replace council members in the next election. People whose preferred rule loses could still speak at meetings and organize support for a different rule.

Accept other passage-supported ways to hold the council accountable, including speaking out or seeking court review. For Your Turn, look for authority from residents, an ongoing means of accountability, and a meaningful role for those who disagree.