Power With Limits

Trace how founding ideas shape public decisions.

USG.C.1.3 "Examine the founding principles of the United States of America's constitutional republic. Explain the principle of popular sovereignty which asserts that governments are created and sustained by the consent of the people who are the..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle two sources of founding ideas, underline one example of popular sovereignty and one limit on government power, and number the two competing concerns in the festival example.

Who Gives Government Its Power?

1. In 1787, delegates gathered in Philadelphia to design a new national government. Their ideas came from several sources, not a single blueprint. Some religious traditions emphasized the equal moral worth of people and the need to answer to a higher moral law. Moral philosophers asked what makes political power just. Enlightenment writers, including John Locke, argued that people possess rights before governments exist and that legitimate government rests on consent. These influences helped shape commitments to liberty and limited power. Yet the Constitution's original design did not give equal political standing to everyone: slavery continued, and voting was largely limited by state law.

2. The Constitution opens with "We the People," placing political authority in the people rather than a king. Popular sovereignty means that government gains legitimacy from their consent and remains accountable to them. The Constitution sets up a republic: voters choose lawmakers who make decisions on their behalf, and written rules limit what officials may do. It also has democratic features, such as elections for members of the House of Representatives. Originally, state legislatures chose U.S. senators; the Seventeenth Amendment later established direct election. Amendments also expanded access to voting, making consent more inclusive over time.

3. Imagine a city council considering a rule that closes a busy street for a public festival. Keeping people safe and traffic moving serves the public good. But a rule that also forbids peaceful protesters from gathering anywhere near city hall could threaten freedom of speech and assembly. The First Amendment protects those freedoms, while constitutional procedures give courts a way to review government action. Officials must consider safety without treating individual rights as obstacles to erase. The tension is built into a constitutional republic: elected leaders can act for the community, but their power has limits even when a policy is popular.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did two different sources of ideas described in the passage contribute to founding principles?

2. How do “We the People” and elections support the principle of popular sovereignty?

3. Use details from the passage to explain how the U.S. government is both democratic and a republic.

4. In the festival example, what public good and individual rights must officials weigh? What constitutional check could apply?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Create a realistic proposal for a federal law that addresses a public problem other than street safety. In 5 to 6 sentences, explain how voters could influence it through representatives, name a public good it serves, identify a constitutional right it might affect, suggest a safeguard, and connect that safeguard to one founding influence from the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Power With Limits

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.1.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle two sources of founding ideas, underline one example of popular sovereignty and one limit on government power, and number the two competing concerns in the festival example. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did two different sources of ideas described in the passage contribute to founding principles?	**Some religious traditions emphasized equal moral worth and higher moral law. Enlightenment writers argued that people have rights before government exists and that legitimate government requires consent.**
2	How do "We the People" and elections support the principle of popular sovereignty?	**"We the People" identifies the people as the source of political authority. Elections let voters choose officials and hold them accountable.**
3	Use details from the passage to explain how the U.S. government is both democratic and a republic.	**Elections for the House are a democratic feature. Voters choose lawmakers to decide on their behalf, and written rules limit officials' power, making the government a republic.**
4	In the festival example, what public good and individual rights must officials weigh? What constitutional check could apply?	**Officials must weigh safety and traffic against protesters' freedom of speech and assembly. Courts can review government action under the Constitution.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress could fund flood alerts sent to residents' phones. Voters could ask their representatives to support the program and vote them out if they ignore concerns. Early warnings serve the public good by helping families escape rising water. Tracking everyone's location at all times could raise Fourth Amendment concerns about unreasonable searches. Congress could require alerts to use broadcast systems without storing residents' location histories. The Enlightenment emphasis on limited government power supports this safeguard.

Accept other supported connections between founding influences and principles in question 1. For Your Turn, accept different plausible proposals if the response addresses every requested element and accurately connects a founding influence to a safeguard.