Power After the Flood

How limits on government shape decisions in a crisis

USG.C.1 "Compare the formation of contemporary governments in terms of access, use, and justification of power. Examine the purposes and functions of government, including the establishment of justice, promotion of general welfare..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two limits on government power, circle two ways people can influence or challenge officials, and number one sentence that compares speed with protection from abuse.

Who Decides How to Rebuild?

(1) After a flood destroys the only bridge to a town, residents face a hard choice: who can order repairs, collect money, and decide which homes receive help? In a hypothetical unlimited system, a ruler could take property for the bridge and silence critics without facing an independent court. The ruler might act quickly, but residents would have no enforceable way to challenge unfair decisions. In a limited system, officials must follow rules that restrict their powers. Speed still matters, yet a rule requiring public records can expose favoritism when officials award repair contracts.

(2) The Constitution of the United States begins with "We the People," reflecting popular sovereignty: political authority comes from the people, not a ruler's birth. Voters elect members of Congress to make laws, so the United States is a republic. Elections also give citizens a democratic way to influence policy, although a majority cannot erase the rights of a minority. The Preamble identifies goals such as establishing justice, promoting the general welfare, and securing liberty. These goals can pull in different directions when officials decide how to spend public money or respond to a crisis.

(3) Consider a federal bridge-repair program after the flood. Congress could authorize funds and set rules for spending them; executive agencies could distribute aid and publish contracts. States and towns would still make many decisions about their own roads. If affected residents believed an aid rule violated their constitutional rights, they could ask a court to review it. Officials might fence off an unstable construction site for safety, but that does not give them a blank check to silence peaceful criticism elsewhere. Compared with an unchecked ruler, this system may take longer to act, but divided authority and protected rights make abuse harder.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might an unlimited ruler repair the bridge faster than officials in a limited system? What protection would residents lose?

2. How does electing Congress show that the United States is both a republic and a democracy?

3. Which two goals in the Preamble could be in tension if officials restrict access to an unsafe bridge site? Explain the tension.

4. How do the roles of Congress, executive agencies, and courts in the passage make abuse of the bridge-repair program harder?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A city wants to use public land as a shelter during a heat wave. In five sentences, propose a decision process that serves public welfare and protects liberty, explain how residents could influence or challenge the plan, and compare it with an unlimited ruler's approach.

ANSWER KEY

Power After the Flood

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two limits on government power, circle two ways people can influence or challenge officials, and number one sentence that compares speed with protection from abuse. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might an unlimited ruler repair the bridge faster than officials in a limited system? What protection would residents lose?	**The ruler could act without following restrictive rules or facing court review. Residents would lose an enforceable way to challenge unfair decisions.**
2	How does electing Congress show that the United States is both a republic and a democracy?	**It is a republic because elected representatives make laws. Elections are a democratic way for citizens to influence those representatives.**
3	Which two goals in the Preamble could be in tension if officials restrict access to an unsafe bridge site? Explain the tension.	**Promoting the general welfare supports keeping people safe at the site, while securing liberty calls for limits on restrictions, including protection for peaceful criticism elsewhere.**
4	How do the roles of Congress, executive agencies, and courts in the passage make abuse of the bridge-repair program harder?	**Congress sets funding rules, agencies carry them out and publish contracts, and courts can review constitutional challenges. No single part controls every decision without scrutiny.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The city council should hold a public meeting before voting to open a shelter on public land. A shelter would help residents escape dangerous heat, but people should remain free to choose whether to enter it. The city should publish its spending plan so residents can question costs or unfair choices. Residents could speak at the meeting and challenge a rule that violates their rights in court. An unlimited ruler might open a shelter faster, but could silence objections and spend public money without scrutiny.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of how rules, elections, divided authority, and court review limit power. For the open task, look for a workable public-welfare measure, a specific liberty protection, a way for residents to influence or challenge officials, and an accurate comparison with unlimited power.