Rules and Rulers

Trace how two agreements shaped ideas about government.

USG.C.2.1.A "Analyze the influence of historical documents regarding the concepts of limited government and popular sovereignty, including the Magna Carta and the Mayflower Compact."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one rule in each historical document that affects who holds power. Circle the words that connect each rule to a broader idea about government.

Who Sets the Rules?

1. Imagine a ruler who can seize land or demand money without consulting anyone. **Limited government** means that even rulers must follow rules. **Popular sovereignty** means that governing authority comes from the people. These ideas did not appear all at once or apply to everyone equally. Historical documents reveal who demanded limits, who claimed a voice, and who was left out. To trace a document's influence, look beyond its date: identify the problem its writers addressed, the rule they proposed, and the later political principle that rule helped shape.

2. In 1215, English barons pressured King John to accept Magna Carta after disputes over his rule. It required the king to seek the "common counsel" of the kingdom for certain payments and promised that a free man would not be imprisoned or lose property except by lawful judgment or the law of the land. These provisions restrained particular royal actions rather than creating modern democracy. The charter chiefly protected powerful groups, and its promises were not always kept. Still, later generations cited its language to argue that government power must answer to law, a lasting argument for limited government.

3. In 1620, passengers aboard the Mayflower signed a compact before settling at Plymouth. Its signers, all men, agreed to form a "civil body politic" and make "just and equal laws" for the colony's general good; they promised to obey those laws. They declared loyalty to King James, yet claimed authority to organize local government through mutual agreement. This early example of self-government illustrates popular sovereignty, although women, Indigenous peoples, and many others had no part in signing it. Later Americans could point to such agreements when arguing that legitimate governments depend on the consent of the governed.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did one provision of Magna Carta limit what King John could do?

2. Why could later generations use Magna Carta to argue for limited government, even though it did not create modern democracy?

3. How did the Mayflower Compact express popular sovereignty even though its signers declared loyalty to a king?

4. What in the passage prevents a reader from claiming that either document gave everyone an equal voice in government?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence founding agreement for a new school club. Include one rule limiting the club president, one rule giving members a say in making rules, and a separate sentence explaining how each rule adapts an idea from a different document in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Rules and Rulers

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.2.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one rule in each historical document that affects who holds power. Circle the words that connect each rule to a broader idea about government. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did one provision of Magna Carta limit what King John could do?	**It required him to seek common counsel for certain payments, or it barred him from imprisoning a free man or taking his property except through lawful judgment or the law of the land.**
2	Why could later generations use Magna Carta to argue for limited government, even though it did not create modern democracy?	**Its provisions placed legal limits on particular royal actions, supporting the argument that rulers must answer to law.**
3	How did the Mayflower Compact express popular sovereignty even though its signers declared loyalty to a king?	**The signers agreed to form a local government, make laws for their colony, and obey those laws through mutual agreement.**
4	What in the passage prevents a reader from claiming that either document gave everyone an equal voice in government?	**Magna Carta chiefly protected powerful groups, while women, Indigenous peoples, and many others did not sign the Mayflower Compact.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our new book club will follow rules its members approve. The president cannot remove a member without a fair hearing under club rules. Members will vote on new rules at monthly meetings. The hearing rule adapts Magna Carta's idea that leaders must follow rules before taking away someone's rights. The members' vote adapts the Mayflower Compact's idea that a group can form a government by agreement.

Accept other accurate Magna Carta provisions and Mayflower Compact connections supported by the passage. In Part 3, look for distinct rules addressing limits on a leader and members' authority, with each linked to the appropriate document.