Rules in a Crisis

Constitutional limits when urgent decisions are needed

USG.C.3.1 "Evaluate the necessity of a written constitution. Identify and describe the purposes for government as stated by the Framers in the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two purposes named in the Preamble, circle three phrases that assign or reserve powers, and number two sentences that explain why written limits matter.

Who Decides During an Emergency?

1. After a chemical spill, a town needs clean water, safe roads, and clear instructions. Who may order an evacuation, spend public money, or close a school? A written constitution does not settle every emergency decision, but it sets lasting rules about who can make decisions and how they can be challenged. Without those rules, an official might claim unlimited authority because the situation is urgent. The U.S. Constitution's Preamble states six aims: form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.

2. Those aims do not give any official a blank check. The national government has enumerated powers, powers listed in the Constitution, such as Congress's power to regulate commerce among the states. Congress makes federal laws and controls federal spending; the president carries out federal laws; federal courts decide cases under the Constitution and federal law. These separate roles make it harder for one person to write, enforce, and judge a rule alone. Powers not delegated to the United States or prohibited to the states are reserved to the states or the people by the Tenth Amendment. In a spill, state and local authorities usually direct school closures.

3. Each state has a written constitution that creates its government, assigns powers, and protects rights under state law. A state constitution might set rules for the governor's emergency authority or for funding public schools. These rules can place additional limits on state officials, but they cannot override the U.S. Constitution or valid federal laws. Article IV, Section 4 promises every state a "Republican Form of Government," meaning government through elected representatives rather than rule by a monarch. A governor cannot use an emergency as a reason to become a permanent ruler. Written rules give residents a basis for questioning that move, even when urgent action is necessary.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might a town need written constitutional rules even when it must act quickly after a spill?

2. Choose two purposes in the Preamble that could guide a response to the spill. Explain how each connects to a need named in the passage.

3. How do enumerated powers, separate branches, and reserved powers each make it harder for one national official to rule alone?

4. Why does a state need its own constitution, and what two national limits on that constitution does the passage identify?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a governor says an emergency gives the governor sole power to impose a new state tax, without a vote by lawmakers or review by courts. Write a rule you would add to a state constitution, then explain how it would limit that power and fit within the national Constitution.

ANSWER KEY

Rules in a Crisis

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.3.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two purposes named in the Preamble, circle three phrases that assign or reserve powers, and number two sentences that explain why written limits matter. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might a town need written constitutional rules even when it must act quickly after a spill?	**Written rules identify who may act and how decisions can be challenged, limiting an official's claim to unlimited emergency authority.**
2	Choose two purposes in the Preamble that could guide a response to the spill. Explain how each connects to a need named in the passage.	**Promoting the general Welfare connects to providing clean water. Insuring domestic Tranquility connects to keeping roads safe and giving clear instructions.**
3	How do enumerated powers, separate branches, and reserved powers each make it harder for one national official to rule alone?	**Enumerated powers limit national authority to powers granted by the Constitution. Separate branches divide making, carrying out, and judging laws. Reserved powers leave authority with the states or the people.**
4	Why does a state need its own constitution, and what two national limits on that constitution does the passage identify?	**A state constitution creates state government, assigns its powers, and protects rights. It cannot override the U.S. Constitution or valid federal laws, and the state must have a republican form of government.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A governor may propose an emergency tax, but elected state lawmakers must approve it before anyone pays it. State courts may review whether the tax follows the state constitution. This rule keeps the governor from making and judging a tax alone while allowing a response to the emergency. The rule must also follow the U.S. Constitution and valid federal laws.

For the marking job, accept any two named Preamble purposes, three accurate assignments or reservations of power, and two sentences explaining the value of written limits. For the open task, accept other workable state rules that prevent the governor from controlling the tax alone and acknowledge national constitutional limits.