Lines That Matter

Examine how district boundaries can shape elections

USG.C.5.6 "Examine ongoing challenges to the election process, including redistricting and the practice of gerrymandering."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline why districts must be redrawn, circle two ways lines can weaken voters' influence, and number two ways people can examine or challenge a map.

Who Draws the Lines?

1 Every ten years, census results show where people have moved. Imagine that the fictional state of Alder has five seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. Its lawmakers must redraw congressional districts so that each district has nearly the same number of residents. A growing suburb cannot simply remain in a district that now has far more people than its neighbors. Redistricting can keep representation tied to population, but equal-sized districts are not automatically fair. Where lawmakers place the lines can affect which voters are grouped together and which candidates have a realistic chance to win.

2 In Alder, many voters in the Harbor neighborhood favor Party B. Mapmakers could pack most of them into one district, where Party B wins by a wide margin. That leaves fewer Party B voters in nearby districts, making those seats harder for the party to win. Alternatively, mapmakers could split another Party B-leaning neighborhood, Hillcrest, among several districts where its voters would be outnumbered. This tactic is called cracking. Both tactics can weaken a group's voting influence without changing anyone's ballot. Such choices may be difficult to spot if people see only district population totals.

3 Gerrymandering is the deliberate drawing of districts to give a political group an advantage. In Alder, an election held under a new map might produce seats that do not closely match statewide support for each party. That mismatch alone does not prove the lines were manipulated, but it raises questions worth investigating. Residents could compare the new boundaries with voting patterns and ask mapmakers to explain their choices. An independent redistricting commission might reduce lawmakers' incentive to protect their own party, though a commission still needs clear rules and public oversight. Courts can also review maps that violate applicable law.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why does Alder need to redraw its districts, and why would equal population alone not settle whether the new map is fair?

2. If mapmakers pack Harbor voters into one district, how could that affect Party B's chances in nearby districts?

3. How would splitting Hillcrest among several districts weaken its voters' influence differently from packing Harbor?

4. Why would a mismatch between statewide support and seats won raise questions but not prove gerrymandering? What could residents examine next?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a fictional city and a neighborhood whose voters tend to support one party. In four sentences, describe how someone might draw council districts to favor a party, explain the likely effect on representation, and propose a safeguard with one limitation.

ANSWER KEY

Lines That Matter

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.5.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline why districts must be redrawn, circle two ways lines can weaken voters' influence, and number two ways people can examine or challenge a map. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why does Alder need to redraw its districts, and why would equal population alone not settle whether the new map is fair?	**Population shifts require districts with nearly equal numbers of residents. Even equal-sized districts can group voters in ways that affect their influence and candidates' chances.**
2	If mapmakers pack Harbor voters into one district, how could that affect Party B's chances in nearby districts?	**Fewer Party B voters would remain in nearby districts, making those seats harder for Party B to win.**
3	How would splitting Hillcrest among several districts weaken its voters' influence differently from packing Harbor?	**Cracking would leave Hillcrest's Party B voters outnumbered in several districts. Packing would concentrate Harbor's Party B voters in one district, leaving fewer in nearby districts.**
4	Why would a mismatch between statewide support and seats won raise questions but not prove gerrymandering? What could residents examine next?	**A mismatch alone does not show that lines were deliberately drawn for an advantage. Residents could compare boundaries with voting patterns and ask mapmakers to explain their choices.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In the fictional city of Cedar Glen, many Party A voters live near the train station. A mapmaker could split that neighborhood among three council districts where Party A voters would be outnumbered, making it harder for them to elect their preferred candidates. A rule requiring public hearings and written explanations for district boundaries could help residents question that choice. Even with hearings, officials might keep the boundaries unless the rules require them to address objections.

Accept other accurate explanations of how packing or cracking can affect representation. For the open task, look for a plausible district-line choice, its likely effect, and a safeguard whose limitation is explained.