A Presidency Questioned

How a scandal changed views of President Reagan

USH.C.8.2.D "Explain how the public's perception of the President was influenced by the Iran-Contra Scandal."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline three details that could change how someone viewed President Reagan. Circle words or phrases that show why Americans might judge him differently.

Iran-Contra and the President's Image

1 In November 1986, Americans learned that members of President Ronald Reagan's administration had secretly sold weapons to Iran. The United States had publicly treated Iran as an adversary, and American hostages were being held in Lebanon by groups linked to Iran. Administration officials hoped Iran would help free the hostages. Reagan had presented himself as a leader who stood firm against hostile governments and refused to bargain for hostages. For some Americans, the secret arms sales clashed with that image. Others thought trying to bring hostages home was understandable, even if the methods raised troubling questions.

2 The scandal grew when investigators found that officials had diverted money from the Iran arms sales to the Contras, rebels fighting Nicaragua's government. Congress had restricted U.S. aid to the Contras. News of the diversion therefore raised a new question: Was the president in control of his own administration? Investigations did not establish that Reagan knew about the diversion in advance, but a presidential commission faulted his supervision of national security staff. To critics, poor oversight weakened his reputation for strong leadership. Supporters could argue that staff members' actions should not all be treated as Reagan's personal decisions.

3 Reagan initially said the United States had not traded arms for hostages. In a televised address in March 1987, he acknowledged that the facts showed otherwise, though he said he had not intended such a trade. Congressional hearings brought officials' actions into living rooms across the country. For many viewers, the changing explanation and secrecy made it harder to trust the president, and his approval ratings fell after the scandal broke. Yet public opinion was not uniform: some still valued his goals or believed he had been misled. Iran-Contra damaged his image without producing a single, shared judgment of him.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might the secret arms sales have changed how some Americans viewed Reagan, even if they wanted the hostages freed?

2. How could the diversion of money to the Contras weaken Reagan's image as a strong leader, even without proof that he knew about it in advance?

3. How might Reagan's changing explanation of the arms sales have affected the public's trust in him?

4. Why might two Americans who knew the same facts about Iran-Contra have judged Reagan differently?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an 80 to 100 word letter to a newspaper editor from the viewpoint of an American in 1987. Explain whether Iran-Contra changed your view of Reagan, use two distinct details from the passage to support your judgment, and acknowledge why someone might disagree.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.8.2.D

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline three details that could change how someone viewed President Reagan. Circle words or phrases that show why Americans might judge him differently. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might the secret arms sales have changed how some Americans viewed Reagan, even if they wanted the hostages freed?	**The sales to Iran conflicted with Reagan's image as a leader who stood firm against hostile governments and refused to bargain for hostages.**
2	How could the diversion of money to the Contras weaken Reagan's image as a strong leader, even without proof that he knew about it in advance?	**The diversion raised doubts about his control of his administration, and a presidential commission faulted his supervision of national security staff.**
3	How might Reagan's changing explanation of the arms sales have affected the public's trust in him?	**After Reagan said the United States had not traded arms for hostages, he acknowledged that the facts showed otherwise. The change, along with the secrecy, could make him seem less trustworthy.**
4	Why might two Americans who knew the same facts about Iran-Contra have judged Reagan differently?	**One might focus on the secrecy and poor oversight and lose confidence in him. Another might value the effort to free hostages or believe staff members misled him.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

To the editor: The Iran-Contra revelations would make me less confident in President Reagan. The secret weapons sales to Iran seemed to contradict the firm stance against hostile governments that he had projected. I also worry that money from those sales reached the Contras despite congressional limits on aid. Investigators did not establish that Reagan knew about that diversion beforehand, but the criticism of his supervision still matters to me. A neighbor might focus instead on the hope of freeing hostages and judge his motives more generously. I respect that view, but secrecy demands accountability.

Accept different judgments of Reagan if students explain how at least two accurate passage details could shape public perception. Do not accept a claim that investigators established he knew about the diversion in advance.