Freedom and the Polis

Read a Classical-period speech in Richard Crawley's translation.

ELA.11.R.2.2 "Analyze the central idea(s) of speeches and essays from the Classical Period."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book II, Funeral Oration of Pericles (430 BCE), translated by Richard Crawley (public domain). Selected nonconsecutive passages from sections 37 and 40; original wording retained, selection breaks added. Source: Internet Classics Archive, https://classics.mit.edu/Thucydides/pelopwar.2.second.html. Thucydides records the speech; this is not a verbatim modern transcript. The speaker presents an idealized claim about Athens; analyze that claim rather than assume it describes every resident equally. Underline claims about government and civic duty. Circle words that connect freedom with law or discussion, and label evidence for the two connected central ideas.

Pericles on Athenian Public Life — Thucydides, Book II

1. Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighbouring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favours the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy.

2. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured, whether they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which, although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace.

3. Our public men have, besides politics, their private affairs to attend to, and our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, regarding him who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless, we Athenians are able to judge at all events if we cannot originate, and, instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What two connected central ideas does the speaker develop?

2. How does the contrast between many and few in paragraph 1 develop the idea about government?

3. How does paragraph 2 qualify the praise of freedom?

4. How does the final paragraph connect private affairs to public discussion?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an 80 to 100 word analytical response that explains one central idea of the speech and how two details develop it. Include one detail from the first two paragraphs and one detail from the final paragraph.

ANSWER KEY

Freedom and the Polis

GRADE 11 · ELA.11.R.2.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book II, Funeral Oration of Pericles (430 BCE), translated by Richard Crawley (public domain). Selected nonconsecutive passages from sections 37 and 40; original wording retained, selection breaks added. Source: Internet Classics Archive, https://classics.mit.edu/Thucydides/pelopwar.2.second.html. Thucydides records the speech; this is not a verbatim modern transcript. The speaker presents an idealized claim about Athens; analyze that claim rather than assume it describes every resident equally. Underline claims about government and civic duty. Circle words that connect freedom with law or discussion, and label evidence for the two connected central ideas. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What two connected central ideas does the speaker develop?	**Athens is praised as a democracy serving the many; this civic freedom depends on obeying laws and participating in informed public discussion.**
2	How does the contrast between many and few in paragraph 1 develop the idea about government?	**The contrast defines democracy as administration favouring many people rather than a few and presents Athens as a model.**
3	How does paragraph 2 qualify the praise of freedom?	**Private ease is not permission to be lawless. Citizens should obey magistrates and laws, especially protections for injured people.**
4	How does the final paragraph connect private affairs to public discussion?	**People with private work are still expected to judge public matters; discussion is presented as necessary preparation for wise action, not an obstacle.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

One central idea is that civic freedom requires responsible public participation. The first paragraph praises a government that favours the many rather than the few. This contrast presents democracy as a shared benefit, not merely an advantage for a small group. The final paragraph says that ordinary citizens with private work still judge public matters. It calls discussion a necessary step before wise action. Together, these details connect broad public government with the effort citizens must make to understand decisions. The speaker presents participation as part of maintaining the city he praises.

Accept supported statements of the central ideas and their relationship. For the 80–100-word response, require one relevant detail from paragraphs 1–2, one from paragraph 3, and explanation of how they develop the chosen idea. Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book II, Funeral Oration of Pericles (430 BCE), translated by Richard Crawley (public domain). Selected nonconsecutive passages from sections 37 and 40; original wording retained, selection breaks added. Source: Internet Classics Archive, https://classics.mit.edu/Thucydides/pelopwar.2.second.html. Thucydides records the speech; this is not a verbatim modern transcript. The speaker presents an idealized claim about Athens; analyze that claim rather than assume it describes every resident equally.