

Voices That Matter

How speech and press support democratic participation

7.16.B “describe the importance of free speech and press in a democratic society.”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show how free speech or a free press helps citizens participate or hold leaders accountable. Circle one detail that shows a responsibility or legal limit, so you can compare freedom with responsible use.

Information, Ideas, and Public Choices

- ① In a democratic society, people can share ideas, criticize leaders, and discuss public problems without government punishment for their views. This freedom of speech helps citizens take part in decisions that affect them. At a school board meeting, a student might speak about unsafe drinking fountains. Other people may disagree, but they can listen, ask questions, and offer evidence. Hearing different views can reveal problems that leaders did not know about and can lead to better choices.
- ② A free press includes newspapers, news websites, and reporters who gather and share information. Journalists can investigate how public officials use money and whether officials keep promises. For example, a local reporter could examine records about a city contract and interview several people before publishing a story. Reliable reporting gives citizens facts they can use when they vote, attend meetings, or contact leaders. It also helps the public hold officials accountable, meaning officials must explain and defend their actions.
- ③ Free speech and press do not mean every statement is protected in every situation. Laws may restrict true threats, some speech that directly urges immediate lawbreaking, and defamatory false statements that harm a person's reputation. Reporters also have a responsibility to check sources and correct errors. Still, government leaders should not silence criticism simply because it embarrasses them or challenges their plans. Democracy needs room for peaceful disagreement, careful reporting, and informed debate about public choices.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How does freedom of speech help citizens influence public decisions?

2 What information can journalists investigate that helps citizens understand whether officials are doing their jobs?

3 How could the reporter's work on a city contract help hold officials accountable?

4 Why should leaders not silence criticism just because it embarrasses them or challenges their plans?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Choose a public issue that affects people in your community or school. Write four sentences explaining how a person could speak about the issue and how a responsible local reporter could help the public take part in the decision.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show how free speech or a free press helps citizens participate or hold leaders accountable. Circle one detail that shows a responsibility or legal limit, so you can compare freedom with responsible use. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does freedom of speech help citizens influence public decisions?	It lets citizens share ideas and concerns about public problems, helping reveal issues and influence leaders' choices.
2	What information can journalists investigate that helps citizens understand whether officials are doing their jobs?	Journalists can investigate how officials use money and whether they keep promises.
3	How could the reporter's work on a city contract help hold officials accountable?	The reporter can examine records and interview people, then publish facts that help the public question officials and require them to explain and defend their actions.
4	Why should leaders not silence criticism just because it embarrasses them or challenges their plans?	Peaceful criticism and disagreement are necessary for informed debate in a democracy, even when leaders dislike the criticism.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our town plans to close the library on Saturdays. At a council meeting, I would explain how students and families use the library and ask leaders to reconsider. A local reporter could check budget records and interview library users before publishing facts. People could then discuss the plan and contact council members using reliable information.

Accept equivalent explanations that connect free speech to citizen participation and a free press to reliable information and accountability. For the open response, accept any plausible public issue that explains both peaceful speaking and responsible reporting.