

Power With Limits

Read how the Constitution distributes power and protects people.

8.15.D “analyze how the U.S. Constitution reflects the principles of limited government, republicanism, checks and balances, federalism, separation of powers, popular sovereignty, and individual rights; and”

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one piece of evidence for each constitutional principle named in the passage. Number your underlines 1 through 7 and write the principle name beside each one.

A Constitution of Shared Power

- ① When the Constitution was written, Americans wanted a national government strong enough to act but not strong enough to rule without limits. Its opening words, “We the People,” show popular sovereignty: government receives its authority from the people. Citizens choose representatives, who make laws on their behalf. This system is republicanism. The Constitution also lists powers Congress may use and forbids certain government actions. By setting boundaries in written law, it creates limited government rather than giving officials unlimited power.
- ② The Constitution divides national power among three branches. Congress writes laws, the president carries out laws, and federal courts interpret laws. This separation of powers keeps one branch from holding every major job. The branches also check one another. For example, a president may veto a bill, Congress can override a veto with enough votes, and courts can rule that a law conflicts with the Constitution. These checks and balances make officials share power and answer to other parts of government.
- ③ Federalism divides authority between the national government and the states. The national government handles matters such as coining money and regulating trade among states, while states run many local matters, including public schools. This division lets different levels address different needs. The Constitution also protects individual rights. The Bill of Rights protects freedoms such as speech, religion, press, assembly, and fair legal procedures. Later amendments expanded voting rights. These protections limit what government may do to individuals, even when a majority supports a different choice.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How do the words “We the People” and the election of representatives show both popular sovereignty and republicanism?

2 How does listing Congress’s powers and forbidding certain actions create limited government?

3 Explain how separation of powers and checks and balances work together. Use one example from the passage.

4 How does federalism divide responsibilities, and how do individual rights limit government?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Imagine Congress proposes a national law requiring public libraries to remove books that criticize elected officials. Write 4 or 5 sentences analyzing the proposal with at least three constitutional principles from the passage. State what each principle suggests about the proposal.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline one piece of evidence for each constitutional principle named in the passage. Number your underlines 1 through 7 and write the principle name beside each one. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the words "We the People" and the election of representatives show both popular sovereignty and republicanism?	"We the People" shows that government authority comes from the people. Electing representatives to make laws shows republicanism.
2	How does listing Congress's powers and forbidding certain actions create limited government?	The Constitution gives Congress specific powers and sets boundaries on government action, so officials do not have unlimited power.
3	Explain how separation of powers and checks and balances work together. Use one example from the passage.	Separation of powers gives different jobs to Congress, the president, and the courts. Checks and balances let them limit one another, such as when Congress can override a presidential veto.
4	How does federalism divide responsibilities, and how do individual rights limit government?	Federalism gives some responsibilities to the national government and others to states, such as local schools. Individual rights protect freedoms and fair procedures, limiting what government can do to people.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The proposal raises individual rights because removing books for criticizing officials limits freedom of speech and press. Limited government means Congress cannot use its power in ways the Constitution forbids. Federalism matters because public libraries are often run by state or local governments, not only by the national government. If Congress passed the law, courts could review it, showing checks and balances and separation of powers.

Accept equivalent explanations that accurately connect each named principle to the proposed law. For the open response, students should analyze at least three principles and make a constitutionally supported claim rather than merely define the principles.