



Democracy

What Is Democracy?

Democracy is the belief that people are capable of governing themselves. Democratic societies are committed to the idea that all members of a society have inherent human rights to life and liberty. Our American democracy evolved from the exercise of political power by the American colonists in managing their own affairs. When Great Britain tried to interrupt this local control and impose the authority of the King of England, the colonists revolted and set up their own government.

What Is Tyranny?

Governments which are under the complete control of a dictator, an absolute monarch (king), or a small group of all-powerful men are called dictatorships or tyrannies. In these governments, the rights of individuals are not considered important, and peoples' freedom to act is limited by a dictatorship. Individual hopes and personal desires are subjected to the overriding interest of the group in control. Communist dictatorships in the former Soviet Union and in China are examples of absolute rule by a small minority.

How Democracy Works

The Founding Fathers who wrote the Constitution designed a government that allows people to govern themselves. They did not believe that people had to make every law or decision themselves. They believed that people should have the right to select their own leaders who would make acceptable laws and appropriate decisions. Many of the founders believed that only the wealthy and respected white men in a community should have the right to vote for their leaders, but the system they created gradually expanded the right to vote to include virtually all adult citizens.

Checks and Balances

The men who wrote the Constitution feared excessive government and distrusted the human ambitions of many people. Therefore, they created a system of government at the federal level in which laws were made in one branch of government (the legislative) but enforced by another branch (the executive). A third branch (the judicial) could monitor the actions and laws created by the other two branches. In addition, the founders specified that many rights were reserved only to the states or the people and not to the federal government at all.





Democracy (cont.)

Evolution of Democracy

Many tribes of primitive peoples were run on democratic principles. The leaders of many American Indian tribes were selected by the tribe. Tribal decisions were often made in councils attended by the entire community. The development of settled agricultural communities and larger warrior tribes in Europe and Asia led to the rise of powerful kings. Occasional efforts were made to curb the powers of these leaders in ancient Greece, for example, and in medieval England. Modern democracy began to evolve with the American Revolution and later with the French Revolution. Powerful kings were often removed by popular uprisings. Sometimes this led to other dictatorships such as those in Russia and China.

Modern Democracy

Today, much of the modern world is governed by some form of democratic government. Some countries have kings (who often possess little real power), and representatives elected by the people make the laws. While dictatorships still exist in the world and often exercise fearsome power, the momentum for democracy is evident. Modern democratic governments not only have freely-elected officials but usually have economies where decisions are made by individuals and not the government. Businesses are free to buy and sell as they wish and to compete on equal terms. Although all governments exercise some control or regulation over certain industries such as electrical power, banking, and land ownership, most decisions are made by consumers in a democracy.

Making a Democracy Work

Successful democracies work effectively when individual citizens are able to do these things:

- Accept the will of the majority. Election outcomes must be respected and all groups need to cooperate in the process of making laws.
- Protect the rights of the minority. No laws can be acceptable which limit the freedoms of any one group of citizens.
- Obey all laws. No group can receive special favors or be exempt from obeying laws.
- Get involved in the process. Join groups that help to create meaningful change. Exercise the right to speak out on issues.
- Vote. Citizens who don't vote don't have a voice in their government.



Reading Comprehension Quiz (cont.)

Democracy

Directions: Read pages 18 and 19 about democracy. Answer these questions based on the information in the selection. Circle the correct answer in each question below. Underline the sentence in the selection where the answer is found.

1. Which word means the belief that people are capable of self government?
A. democracy
B. tyranny
C. monarchy
D. dictatorship
2. Which branch of the federal government makes laws?
A. executive
B. legislative
C. judicial
D. FBI
3. Which revolution led to the evolution of modern democracy?
A. French
B. American
C. Russian
D. Chinese
4. In which of these governments are officials freely elected by the citizens?
A. absolute monarchy
B. tyranny
C. democracy
D. dictatorship
5. What is the name for a small group of all-powerful men in a government?
A. democracy
B. legislature
C. monarchy
D. dictatorship
6. Which of these governments believes that its citizens have inherent rights to liberty and life?
A. communist
B. absolute monarchy
C. democracy
D. dictatorship
7. Which branch of the federal government enforces the laws?
A. executive
B. legislative
C. judicial
D. courts
8. Who wrote the United States Constitution?
A. Congress
B. Founding Fathers
C. President Washington
D. Abraham Lincoln
9. Which of these phrases is closest in meaning to the word *minority*?
A. most of the voters
B. poor people
C. women
D. less than half of the voters
10. Which of these could be an absolute monarch?
A. President of the U. S.
B. king
C. congressman
D. governor



Answer Key

Page 20

1. B
2. C
3. A
4. A
5. B
6. A
7. D
8. D
9. D
10. C

Page 21

1. B
2. A
3. B
4. A
5. C
6. C
7. A
8. D
9. C
10. B

Page 22

1. B
2. D
3. C
4. B
5. C
6. A
7. A
8. C
9. B
10. D

Page 23

1. B
2. A
3. C
4. C
5. A
6. C
7. B
8. A
9. D
10. C

Page 24

1. A
2. B
3. B
4. C
5. D
6. C
7. A
8. B
9. D
10. B

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1. Answers will vary.
2. Rob took the ruler punishment rather than read the note aloud.
3. They admire her.
4. Rob does the work. Soup does the directing.
5. Norma Jean. She thought the boys had worked hard to win.
6. Miss Kelly told the boys that she would want any prospective beau to serenade her. It was the romantic thing to do.

7. The owner was on the school board.
8. Answers will vary.
9. 1936 presidential election – Roosevelt vs. Landon

Page 48

- California 55
New York 29
Texas 38
Pennsylvania 20
Kansas 6
North Carolina 15
South Dakota 3
Washington 12
Florida 29
New Mexico 5
New Hampshire 4
Nebraska 5
Iowa 6
Montana 3
Vermont 3
Georgia 16
Nevada 6
Alabama 9
Mississippi 6
Idaho 4

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2. California
3. Wyoming
Montana
Alaska
North Dakota
South Dakota
Vermont