Name _____ Date _____

# The Roman Republic: Patricians, Plebeians and the Senate

**Directions:** First read how Rome became a republic. Then look at the table comparing patricians and plebeians before you answer.

## The Roman Republic

### A City Without a King

Rome grew up on a group of hills beside the Tiber River in central Italy, about 15 miles from the sea. The hills were easy to defend, and an island in the river made crossing easier there. According to Roman legend, the city was founded in 753 BCE. At first, kings ruled Rome.

By Roman tradition, the last king was driven out in 509 BCE. Rome became a republic, a government in which citizens elect their leaders instead of being ruled by a king.

Citizens elected two consuls to lead the government and command the army. Each consul could block the other's decisions, and each served for only one year. These rules limited the power of any one leader. The Senate, a council of leading Romans, advised the consuls. In theory it only gave advice, but its advice was usually carried out.

Patricians came from a small number of old, noble families. Plebeians were all the other citizens. Some plebeians were poor farmers, while others were rich traders.

In the early Republic, patricians held most of the power, and plebeians pushed for more rights. Roman writers say that in 494 BCE, the plebeians left the city until they could choose their own officials, called tribunes of the plebs. In about 450 BCE, Rome's laws were written on twelve tablets, called the Twelve Tables. They were set up in the Forum, the city's main public square. This helped plebeians learn the laws and protect themselves. In the 300s BCE, plebeians won the right to be elected consul.

Patricians and plebeians in the Roman Republic

| Topic | Patricians | Plebeians |
|---|---|---|
| Who they were | Members of a small number of old, noble families | All other citizens, from poor farmers to rich traders |
| Share of citizens | A small part of the citizens | Most of the citizens |
| Serving as consul | In the early Republic, the consuls came from patrician families. | Not allowed in the early Republic. Plebeians won the right to be consul in the 300s BCE. |
| Tribunes of the plebs | Could not serve as tribunes | Chose tribunes from among themselves. A tribune could block an official's action to protect a citizen. |

**1.** According to the passage, what made Rome's location a good place for a town?

A. It stood high in the mountains, far from any river.

B. Its hills were easy to defend, and an island made the river easier to cross.

C. It was surrounded by a desert that kept enemies away.

D. It sat right on the seashore beside a large harbor.

**2.** What does the word republic mean in the passage about Rome?

A. A council of leading Romans that gave advice

B. A set of laws set up in the Forum

C. A government led by one family of kings

D. A government in which citizens elect their leaders instead of having a king

**3.** Which two rules about Rome's consuls limited the power of any one leader?

☐ A. Each consul served for only one year.

☐ B. Consuls commanded the army.

☐ C. Consuls led the government.

☐ D. Each consul could block the other's decisions.

**4.** What did the Senate do, according to the passage?

A. It commanded the army in every war.

B. It chose a new king every year.

C. It blocked any action that harmed plebeians.

D. It advised the consuls, and its advice was usually carried out.

**5.** According to the table, how were patricians and plebeians different?

A. Patricians were a small group of old families, while plebeians were most of the citizens.

B. Patricians could serve as tribunes, but plebeians could not.

C. There were many more patricians than plebeians.

D. Patricians were poor farmers, while plebeians were nobles.

**6.** The passage says that in the early Republic, patricians held most of the power. Which detail from the table supports this?

A. Plebeians ranged from poor farmers to rich traders.

B. Plebeians chose tribunes from among themselves.

C. Plebeians were most of the citizens.

D. In the early Republic, the consuls came from patrician families.

**7.** Which statement about plebeians is supported by both the passage and the table?

A. Not all plebeians were poor.

B. Plebeians could serve as consul from the start of the Republic.

C. Plebeians were a small part of Rome's citizens.

D. Plebeians came from a few old, noble families.

**8.** According to the table, what could a tribune of the plebs do?

A. Command the army in place of the consuls

B. Turn a plebeian family into a patrician family

C. Choose the next king of Rome

D. Block an official's action to protect a citizen

**9.** Complete the sentences about how Rome's government changed over time.

| **Word bank** |
| --- |
| 509 • 494 • 300s • 753 |

By Roman tradition, the Republic began in _____ BCE. Much later, in the _____ BCE, plebeians won the right to be elected consul.

**10.** How did writing the laws on the Twelve Tables help plebeians?

A. It helped them learn the laws and protect themselves.

B. It let them become consuls right away.

C. It made every plebeian a patrician.

D. It ended the Senate.