



Who Really Runs the World?

Grade 6

Name: _____

Read the passage carefully. Then answer each question in a full sentence, citing evidence from the text. Use quotation marks when quoting directly.

The Power of Information



In any country, who controls information often controls power, shaping what citizens know and believe. Imagine two neighboring houses: one with open windows where everyone can see outside, share news freely, and discuss events openly, and another with thick, curtained windows where only the homeowner decides what news gets in or out. This simple image helps us understand the vast difference between a democracy, where civil liberties include freedom of the press and expression, and an authoritarian state, where information is tightly controlled and used as a tool of the government.

During the Cold War, the division of Germany into East and West offered a stark real-world example of these two systems. In the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), the ruling Socialist Unity Party maintained strict control over all media outlets. State-run newspapers, radio, and television channels served as instruments for propaganda, meticulously presenting only information that supported the government's narrative and goals. Citizens were constantly told their country was prosperous and free, while any form of dissent was swiftly suppressed. The powerful executive branch often overrode the nominal legislature and judiciary to enforce its will, severely limiting the people's sovereignty and their fundamental civil liberties.

Across the border in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), a vibrant and independent press thrived as a cornerstone of its democratic system. Journalists were free to investigate government actions, question policies, and report on diverse viewpoints without fear of reprisal. This freedom of information was protected by a robust



system where the legislature debated and passed laws, the judiciary upheld individual rights, and the executive was held accountable to the people through regular elections. Crucially, West German media often broadcast into East Germany, offering a stark contrast to the official narrative and providing a vital window to the outside world for many East Germans.

This profound difference in information access played a crucial role in historical events, particularly leading up to 1989. For decades, East German citizens could tune into West German television and radio, seeing and hearing about a different reality—one with more choices, freedoms, and open discussions—than the one presented by their own government. This exposure slowly but surely eroded the effectiveness of state propaganda and fueled a growing desire for change and greater civil liberties. When widespread protests erupted in 1989, culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall, the yearning for truth and freedom of information was a powerful driving force behind the movement. As Thomas Jefferson famously stated, "Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost."

Ultimately, the story of East and West Germany highlights that a free press is not just a luxury but an absolutely essential safeguard for democracy. It empowers citizens with accurate knowledge, holds leaders accountable for their actions, and protects fundamental civil liberties by ensuring transparency. Without a truly independent press, propaganda can easily distort reality, making it incredibly difficult for people to make informed decisions and truly exercise their sovereignty over their own lives and government.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

(1) What did the state-run media in East Germany primarily serve as?



(2) In the context of the passage, what does "sovereignty" mean for the people in an authoritarian state?

(3) What is the central idea the author wants to convey about the press in different political systems?

(4) What is the author's main purpose in comparing East and West Germany, and what is their point of view on a free press?

(5)



According to the passage, what did Thomas Jefferson say about the freedom of the press?

(6) How did the media in East Germany differ from the media in West Germany, according to the passage?

(7) Based on the passage, which safeguard described—a free press or the separation of powers (legislature, judiciary, executive)—is presented as most important for protecting citizens, and why?

