

Civil Disobedience

Henry David Thoreau

Why does Thoreau say majority rule explains who wins but not who is right?

TOTAL TIME

PASSAGE

30 minutes	Conscience versus majority
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FIND THE ANCHOR TEXT

Use the Anchor Text Table of Contents in the Enhanced Reader to open the START anchor. Then use the dropdown to select the END anchor.

SECTION / LOCATION	Essay - majority rule and conscience passage
START	After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted
END	I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward.
PASSAGE ID	sec-cd-02

THE MOVE

Separate power to decide from moral authority to decide

WHY THIS PASSAGE

Thoreau argues that majority rule explains who has more physical power, not who has moral truth. By separating numerical strength from conscience, he creates a reason for individuals to resist legal decisions they judge unjust.

MARK

Underline the explanation for why majorities are able to rule. Circle the sentences about conscience and justice. Draw a line showing where the argument moves from POWER to RIGHT.

NOTICE

- What can a majority establish simply by having more votes or force?
- What can numbers not establish according to Thoreau?
- Why does separating power from moral authority increase the responsibility of the individual?

THINK

Answer provisionally: Why does Thoreau say majority rule explains who wins but not who is right? Choose the strongest interpretation you can defend from this passage alone.

WRITE

Write a short evidence-based response to: Why does Thoreau say majority rule explains who wins but not who is right? Use at least two details from the assigned passage and explain how they support your interpretation.

CLOSE

Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and explain why.

STRONG ANSWER	Majority rule explains who has enough power to decide, not whether the decision is just. Numerical strength and moral authority are different categories.
EVIDENCE	Use Thoreau's description of why majorities rule and his appeal to conscience or being 'men first.'
WATCH FOR	Do not say majority decisions are always wrong. The claim is that numbers cannot by themselves establish moral rightness.
SOLO	Read the exact passage independently.
SUPPORTED	Use narration and sentence highlighting while reading the same passage.
LISTENING	Listen to the exact passage; visual following is optional. Same question and evidence demand.

STUDENT PAGE · SAME PASSAGE, SAME THINKING

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Why does Thoreau say majority rule explains who wins but not who is right?

START ANCHOR	After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted
END ANCHOR	I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward.

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OPEN THE MARKED PASSAGE IN TUMBLELIT

SOLO: read independently. SUPPORTED: use narration + highlighting. LISTENING: listen to the exact passage. The question and evidence task stay the same.

1. MARK - Underline the explanation for why majorities are able to rule. Circle the sentences about conscience and justice. Draw a line showing where the argument moves from POWER to RIGHT.
2. NOTICE - What can a majority establish simply by having more votes or force? What can numbers not establish according to Thoreau? Why does separating power from moral authority increase the responsibility of the individual?
3. THINK - Answer provisionally: Why does Thoreau say majority rule explains who wins but not who is right?
4. WRITE - Write a short response using at least two pieces of evidence from this passage.

Use evidence from the assigned passage. Show what you noticed and how the text supports your interpretation.