Majority Rules and Minority Rights

Majority rule is a way for our government to stay organized. Majority rule allows for people to vote for or against an issue. The most popular vote for or against the issue will win. For example, an eighth grade class is faced with making a choice for a class trip. The choices are Hershey Park or Knoebels. The class holds a vote and 51% of the class votes for Hershey Park and only 49% votes for Knoebels. Majority rule in this case shows that Hershey Park will be the class trip.

Minority rights is when the group that does not have the majority rule will not be discriminated against. Their basic rights cannot be taken away from them, and they will still be represented. As in the example of the class trip, the group that did not vote in favor of Hershey Park still has the right to go to Hershey Park.

The relationship between the two is basically clear. Even though the majority rule is in play, the people without the popular vote will still have the same benefits as the people with the majority or winning vote. Simply put, the minority will still be represented regardless of the outcome of the majority. This way, the rights of the minorities are still being held intact and cannot be taken away from them.

Majority rule and minority rights are also incorporated into the U.S. Constitution. The 1st amendment states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press". This amendment to the Constitution makes it clear that everyone has the right to choose a religion and participate in their respected religion without a majority telling them that they are unable to. It also does not allow the government to establish a state religion that all citizens must fund, such as in England where citizens have to pay taxes to support the Church of England.

Next, Amendment 14, section 1 states "This amendment protects the rights of the minority as well as the majority; this amendment allows everyone the right to be equally protected under law. In addition, no one can be deprived of any of the privileges of the United States."

An example of majority rule with the respect of minority rights in American government would be Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka. In this case, African American children were denied the right to attend school with the white children. The courts sided with Brown and felt that separation of children according to race deprived children of their minority rights of an equal educational opportunity, even though the majority wanted to keep them separated.

Another example of Majority rule with the respect of minority rights in American government was Reed vs. Reed. In this case, Sally Reed was denied the right
to be named administrator of the estate of her late son, who was a minor and lived with her. Ms. Reed's ex-husband, Mr. Reed, also filed to be administrator of his son's estate. Originally, Mr. Reed was appointed, but Ms. Reed felt that she was discriminated against because of her gender and that her fourteenth amendment rights were violated. At the time, there was an Idaho law which stated that a mother and father are equally entitled to be administrators, but the preference given to males is mandatory. Ms. Reed was classified as the minority in this case because of the state law, but the fourteenth amendment states that no person can be denied the right to equal protection of the law. In turn, Ms. Reed was then named administrator, and Idaho changed the law that allowed men and women to be equally considered as an administrator of a decedent's estate.

With majority rule and minority rights, we can see that both go hand in hand and that even though the minority might not win the vote they still have the same rights and privileges as the majority. The minority are also able to bring their arguments to light in courts as we have seen in the two cases listed above.
Answer the following questions based on the reading. **Your answers must be in sentence form.**

1. What does Majority Rule mean?

2. What does Minority Rights mean?

3. Name 2 constitutional amendments that support the idea of Majority Rules with Minority Rights.

4. Who was the minority in the case of Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka?

5. Explain how the case Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka upheld the rights of the minority.

6. Who was the minority in the case of Reed vs. Reed?

7. Explain how the case Reed vs. Reed upheld the rights of the minority.