**Option B HW—Short reading on Plato (Boris Johnson)**

*In July of 2019, Boris Johnson became prime minister of Great Britain. The British magazine “The Economist” wrote the following critical article, arguing that Johnson doesn’t measure up against Plato’s standards for an ideal, wise leader.*

*In ½-1 page of writing (Times New Roman, 12 point font, 1.5 line spacing, shared with* [*nbutkevich@tamdistrict.org*](mailto:nbutkevich@tamdistrict.org)*):*

1. ***Summarize*** *the main points of the article. What makes up an ideal leader and why does Plato think all democracies are doomed to failure?*
2. ***Analysis:***Pick ONE of the following analysis prompts.
   1. *Are Plato’s ideals realistic for today’s leaders? Why or why not? You can use modern world leaders as examples to* ***back up your arguments.***
   2. *Assume, for argument’s sake, that Plato is correct—all democracies eventually fail and become dictatorships. What do you think citizens should do to help prevent this bad outcome?*

Excerpts from “What would Plato make of Boris Johnson?” The Economist

<https://www.economist.com/britain/2019/06/22/what-would-plato-make-of-boris-johnson>

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In “The Republic”, Plato argued that the most important qualities in a statesman were truthfulness and expertise. A good statesman will “never willingly tolerate an untruth”. (“Is it possible to combine in the same character a love of wisdom and a love of falsehood?” one of Plato’s characters asks. “Quite impossible,” comes the reply.) He will spend his life studying everything that he needs to make him a good captain of the ship of state—“the seasons of the year, the sky, the stars, the winds and other professional subjects”…

[The] surest signs of a bad leader are narcissism [excessive love of self] and self-indulgence. The poor statesman is an eloquent flatterer, who relies on his ability to entertain the masses with speeches and comic turns, but doesn’t bother to develop a coherent view of the world. Plato was particularly vitriolic [angry] about the scions [sons] of the upper classes who are offered the opportunity to study philosophy while young but don’t apply themselves, because they think they are so talented that they needn’t earn their place at the top table…

“The Republic” is haunted by the fear that democracies eventually degenerate into tyrannies [dictatorships]. Democracy is the most alluring [attractive] form of government: “the diversity of its characters, like the different colors in a patterned dress, make it look very attractive.” But it is inherently unstable. Citizens are so consumed by pleasure-seeking that they beggar [bankrupt] the economy; so hostile to authority that they ignore the advice of experts; and so committed to liberty that they lose any common purpose.

As democracies collapse under the pressure of their contradictions, panicked citizens look for salvation in a **demagogue**. These are men who love power, but cannot control their own desires for “holidays and dinners and parties and girlfriends and so on”. Plato calls them the “most wretched [miserable] of men because of the disorder raging within them”. Citizens are so consumed by fear that they think these wretches [miserable people] have magical abilities to solve the country’s problems and restore proper order. Demagogues get their start by “taking over a particularly obedient mob”, before seizing control of the country. But the more power they acquire the worse things become, “for the doctor removes the poison and leaves the healthy elements in the body, while the tyrant does the opposite.”

Democracies have proved more durable than Plato imagined. And his cure for the problems of democracy—the rule of **philosopher-kings** [an elite group of a society’s smartest people given total power]—is eccentric to put it mildly. But he is right that character matters. Politicians can change their advisers or their policies, but character is sticky. He is also right that democracies can suddenly give way to populist authoritarianism. [a dictatorship based on the idea that “The Leader” represents “The Common People” against an evil “Elite”]. Most have taken the precaution of constructing constitutional protections to save themselves from Plato’s nightmare…