Whose Liberty Counts?

Compare arguments for rights in the early United States

SS24.6.11c "Assess the arguments made by groups and individuals seeking greater inclusion and advancement of fundamental values in the late 1700s, including women and Black Americans, who were excluded from early American political participation."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each argument about rights, circle the change each person or group wanted, and number the places where the passage shows a limit on that change. Use your marks to judge how each argument challenged exclusion.

A Promise Put to the Test

1 In 1776, as American leaders debated independence, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband John, a member of the Continental Congress. She asked him to "Remember the Ladies" when making new laws. She argued that women should not be bound by laws made without their voice. Her warning challenged a familiar complaint of the Patriots: people should not be ruled without a say. Adams did not ask directly for voting rights, but she pushed leaders to think about whose voices counted in a new government.

2 In 1777, a group of enslaved men sent a petition to the Massachusetts legislature. They argued that every person had a natural right to freedom and that slavery went against the ideals Americans used to defend independence. The petitioners pointed out a sharp contradiction: colonists demanded liberty from Britain while keeping other people in bondage. They asked lawmakers to end slavery in Massachusetts. Like Adams, they used the Patriots' own ideas to challenge exclusion. Unlike her letter, their petition demanded release from slavery, not simply a voice in lawmaking.

3 These arguments put America's promises to a hard test. Adams could write to a powerful leader, but women could not vote in most new states. Enslaved petitioners spoke to lawmakers, yet the 1777 petition did not end slavery. In the early 1780s, court decisions helped bring slavery to an end in Massachusetts, but slavery continued in other states. A strong way to judge both arguments is to ask whether the Patriots' claim that rights belong to people can stand if leaders deny those rights to some people.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Adams use a Patriot belief to challenge laws made without women's voices? Why was that a strong argument?

2. What contradiction did the petitioners point out? Explain how it supported their request.

3. Which group asked for a more immediate change to its legal condition? Use a detail from the passage to support your judgment.

4. Assess the petitioners' argument using the later events in the passage. What made their claim strong, and what limit did events reveal?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence message to a lawmaker in 1777 arguing for one specific change for women or enslaved people. Use a Patriot belief about rights, then name a possible objection and answer it.

ANSWER KEY

Whose Liberty Counts?

GRADE 6 · SS24.6.11c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each argument about rights, circle the change each person or group wanted, and number the places where the passage shows a limit on that change. Use your marks to judge how each argument challenged exclusion. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Adams use a Patriot belief to challenge laws made without women's voices? Why was that a strong argument?	**Patriots objected to being ruled without a say. Adams argued that making laws without women's voices broke that same principle.**
2	What contradiction did the petitioners point out? Explain how it supported their request.	**Colonists demanded liberty from Britain while enslaving others. The petitioners used that contradiction to argue that lawmakers should end slavery.**
3	Which group asked for a more immediate change to its legal condition? Use a detail from the passage to support your judgment.	**The enslaved petitioners asked lawmakers to end slavery. Adams asked leaders to consider women's voices when making laws, but did not directly ask for voting rights.**
4	Assess the petitioners' argument using the later events in the passage. What made their claim strong, and what limit did events reveal?	**Their claim drew on the Patriots' own belief in liberty. The petition did not end slavery, and even after court decisions helped end it in Massachusetts, slavery continued in other states.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Massachusetts lawmakers, let women who own property vote in state elections. Patriots say people should have a voice in rules that govern them, and women must obey those rules too. Some lawmakers may say a husband speaks for his wife. A husband cannot speak for every woman, and each woman has her own views.

Accept reasoned comparisons grounded in the passage. For the message, accept either group if the four sentences include a specific change, a Patriot belief about rights, an objection, and a response.