A Government's Goals

Read the Preamble's words as clues to its authors' purposes.

SS24.6.13b "Describe how the authors of the Constitution viewed the primary functions of government, based on the wording of the Preamble."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each quoted Preamble phrase that names a goal for government. Circle words in those phrases that help you infer whom or what the goal concerns.

What Should a Government Do?

1. Imagine thirteen states trying to act as one country after the American Revolution. In 1787, delegates wrote a Constitution to replace an earlier, weaker plan for national government. Its opening words, called the Preamble, state why they wanted a new government. It begins with "We the People," then lists goals, including "form a more perfect Union" and "establish Justice." The words point toward a country whose parts work together and whose laws are fair. They describe aims for government, not a list of specific laws to pass.

2. A quarrel between neighbors that turns violent is not the same as a foreign army crossing a border. Yet each could threaten many people if no shared authority could respond. The Preamble places "insure domestic Tranquility" beside "provide for the common defence." It also calls for government to "promote the general Welfare." Picture a clean water supply shared by families, farmers, and merchants. None of these words gives a step-by-step plan. Instead, they offer reasons for creating a government that can serve the nation.

3. The Preamble does not stop with people alive in 1787. It says the government should "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity." Posterity means people born in later generations. The authors close by saying the people "do ordain and establish this Constitution." They present government as a way to pursue lasting goals, not just settle a single emergency. Those goals were ideals. At the time, many people, including enslaved people and most women, were denied the vote.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do “form a more perfect Union” and “establish Justice” suggest two different jobs for government?

2. What two kinds of threats do “domestic Tranquility” and “common defence” suggest government should address? Use the situations in the passage.

3. What does “promote the general Welfare” suggest government should consider when making decisions?

4. Why does “our Posterity” suggest the authors expected government to think beyond their own time?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Your town must choose between repairing a public bridge and building a private clubhouse for a few residents. In four sentences, use two different Preamble goal phrases to argue which project better fits the authors' view of government's jobs.

ANSWER KEY

A Government's Goals

GRADE 6 · SS24.6.13b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each quoted Preamble phrase that names a goal for government. Circle words in those phrases that help you infer whom or what the goal concerns. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do "form a more perfect Union" and "establish Justice" suggest two different jobs for government?	**Government should help the states work together as one country and support fair laws.**
2	What two kinds of threats do "domestic Tranquility" and "common defence" suggest government should address? Use the situations in the passage.	**Government should address dangers within the country, such as violent disputes, and threats from outside it, such as a foreign attack.**
3	What does "promote the general Welfare" suggest government should consider when making decisions?	**Government should consider the well-being of the public as a whole, not only one person or group.**
4	Why does "our Posterity" suggest the authors expected government to think beyond their own time?	**Posterity means later generations, so the authors wanted government to protect liberty for people in the future.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would choose to repair the public bridge rather than build the private clubhouse. The bridge fits "promote the general Welfare" because many residents need it to travel safely. It also supports "form a more perfect Union" by helping people in different parts of town stay connected. A clubhouse for only a few residents would serve a smaller group.

Accept reasonable inferences tied to the wording of the Preamble. For Part 3, students should use two distinct goal phrases and explain how each supports their choice.