# Rights in Context

Three documents, different settings for human rights

**SS24.CWI.8b** "Describe key rights and beliefs related to human rights as embedded in the Declaration of Independence, Geneva Conventions, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline one key right, belief, or protection in each paragraph, then circle words that show when the document applies or a limit on its reach.

### What Do Rights Require?

1. Imagine a town debating who deserves protection when a crisis begins. In 1776, the Declaration of Independence gave a reason for separating the American colonies from Britain: "all men are created equal" and have "unalienable Rights," including "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It argued that governments get their just powers from the consent of the governed and exist to secure these rights. Its words made a claim about rights people possess, rather than favors rulers grant. Yet the new nation did not extend equal rights in practice to enslaved people, women, or Indigenous peoples.

2. Now imagine that fighting reaches the town. The Geneva Conventions, four treaties adopted in 1949, set rules for armed conflict rather than for every part of ordinary life. They require humane treatment of wounded and sick people, prisoners of war, and civilians caught in conflict. Medical workers must be protected while doing their work. The conventions prohibit torture and cruel treatment of people who are not fighting or are no longer fighting. These rules do not say that war is harmless or that every person in war has the same legal status. They limit what parties to a conflict may do.

3. After a conflict, the same town still has questions about rights at school, at work, and in public life. In 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or UDHR. It says all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. It names rights such as education, freedom of expression, and equal protection under the law. Unlike the Geneva Conventions, its scope is not limited to armed conflict. The UDHR is a declaration, not a treaty that by itself binds countries, but it has shaped later laws and agreements about how people should be treated.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. According to the Declaration of Independence, where do rights come from, and what should governments do about them?

2. What protection do the Geneva Conventions require for a wounded person and a prisoner of war?

3. Which two ideas in the UDHR could guide a decision about a student being denied schooling because of their background?

4. Someone claims that human rights matter only during war. How does the UDHR challenge that claim, and how do the Geneva Conventions relate to it?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A town is rebuilding its school and clinic while armed conflict continues nearby. Write four sentences proposing town actions tied to one belief from the Declaration, one protection from the Geneva Conventions, and one right from the UDHR, then explain which document applies specifically during armed conflict.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.CWI.8b

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one key right, belief, or protection in each paragraph, then circle words that show when the document applies or a limit on its reach. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | According to the Declaration of Independence, where do rights come from, and what should governments do about them? | **People possess rights that rulers do not grant. Governments should secure those rights and get their just powers from the consent of the governed.** |
| 2 | What protection do the Geneva Conventions require for a wounded person and a prisoner of war? | **Both must be treated humanely. The conventions also prohibit torture and cruel treatment of people who are no longer fighting.** |
| 3 | Which two ideas in the UDHR could guide a decision about a student being denied schooling because of their background? | **The UDHR names a right to education and says all people are equal in dignity and rights. It also names equal protection under the law.** |
| 4 | Someone claims that human rights matter only during war. How does the UDHR challenge that claim, and how do the Geneva Conventions relate to it? | **The UDHR describes rights, such as education and freedom of expression, that are not limited to wartime. The Geneva Conventions set rules specifically for armed conflict.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The town council should listen to residents because the Declaration says governments get their just powers from the consent of the governed. During the fighting, all parties must protect clinic workers and treat wounded people humanely under the Geneva Conventions. The town should reopen school to every child because the UDHR names education and equal rights. The Geneva Conventions apply specifically during armed conflict, while the UDHR describes rights beyond war.

Accept other accurate rights or protections named in the passage. For the final question, look for a clear contrast between the UDHR's broader scope and the Geneva Conventions' focus on armed conflict.