Ideas Into Institutions

Trace Enlightenment ideas into the design of U.S. government

SS24.USG.1 "Explain how Enlightenment principles informed the structure and principles of the United States government, its founding documents, its institutions, and the division of powers, as set forth in Leviathan (Thomas Hobbes, 1651)..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each thinker's central idea, circle a connected U.S. document, right, or institution, and write matching numbers beside each idea and its U.S. connection.

How Much Power Should Government Have?

1. In 1787, Americans faced a hard question: how could a government protect people without becoming their master? Thomas Hobbes argued in *Leviathan* (1651) that people escaping violent disorder need a powerful sovereign to keep peace. His warning made the case for effective authority, but the Constitution did not grant a ruler Hobbes's sweeping power. John Locke offered a different test in *Two Treatises of Government* (1689): government depends on consent and must protect natural rights. The Declaration of Independence echoes Locke when it names rights and says the people may change a government that violates them.

2. Power also had to be organized. In *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Montesquieu warned that liberty is endangered when the same hands make, enforce, and judge laws. The Constitution instead assigns those functions chiefly to Congress, the president, and federal courts, with checks between them. It also divides authority between the federal government and the states. Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued in *The Social Contract* (1762) that legitimate political authority rests on the people. American founders adapted popular sovereignty to a representative republic: the Constitution begins with "We the People," and voters choose House members every two years, although Rousseau distrusted representation.

3. Consider an emergency in which officials want to silence a newspaper and prohibit worship meetings. Voltaire's *Treatise on Tolerance* (1763) challenged religious persecution and argued for tolerance, though he did not draft American rights. The First Amendment later barred Congress from establishing a religion or prohibiting its free exercise, and it protects freedom of the press. Those protections constrain officials even when they claim public safety demands obedience. Read together, these works suggest a tension rather than a single blueprint: government needs enough strength to preserve order, but rights, elections, and divided powers keep that strength accountable.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence reflect different parts of Hobbes's and Locke's thinking about government power?

2. What danger did Montesquieu identify, and how does the Constitution's division of federal powers address it?

3. How did the founders adapt Rousseau's idea of popular sovereignty, and how did their approach differ from his view of representation?

4. How does the First Amendment reflect Voltaire's argument in the passage? Name one protection that makes the connection clear.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine Congress proposes a law allowing the president to cancel future House elections and make laws alone during an emergency. In five or six sentences, explain how two named thinkers from the passage would evaluate the proposal. For each thinker, connect the idea to a different feature of the Constitution.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each thinker's central idea, circle a connected U.S. document, right, or institution, and write matching numbers beside each idea and its U.S. connection. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence reflect different parts of Hobbes's and Locke's thinking about government power?	**Hobbes emphasized strong authority to maintain peace, but the Constitution did not give a ruler sweeping power. Locke emphasized consent and natural rights, which the Declaration names and uses to justify changing an abusive government.**
2	What danger did Montesquieu identify, and how does the Constitution's division of federal powers address it?	**Montesquieu warned that combining lawmaking, enforcement, and judgment endangers liberty. The Constitution assigns these functions chiefly to Congress, the president, and federal courts, with checks between them.**
3	How did the founders adapt Rousseau's idea of popular sovereignty, and how did their approach differ from his view of representation?	**The Constitution claims authority from the people and provides for elected House members. The founders used representatives, while Rousseau distrusted representation.**
4	How does the First Amendment reflect Voltaire's argument in the passage? Name one protection that makes the connection clear.	**Voltaire argued against religious persecution. The First Amendment bars Congress from establishing a religion or prohibiting its free exercise.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Montesquieu would oppose letting the president make laws alone because it combines legislative and executive power. The Constitution assigns lawmaking chiefly to Congress, so the proposal would erase that division. Rousseau would object to canceling House elections because political authority must rest on the people. The Constitution provides for voters to choose House members every two years. Canceling those elections would remove a regular way for the people to exercise political power.

Accept other accurate connections supported by the passage. For the open task, look for two named thinkers, two distinct constitutional features, and an explanation of how the proposed law conflicts with each.