Ideas Into Action

Enlightenment ideas and the American Revolution

SS24.WH.1 "Explain how the Enlightenment influenced societies and inspired revolutions in Europe and the Americas. 1a Compare and contrast the emerging ideas of Adam Smith, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, Mary Wollstonecraft, Montesquieu..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each thinker's main idea, then circle where an idea influenced an American document. Number one place where American society fell short of its ideals.

From Debate to Revolution

1 In an eighteenth-century coffeehouse, readers might have argued over who should rule and what governments owed people. John Locke said people have natural rights to life, liberty, and property. A government gets its authority from the people's consent, and people may replace one that violates their rights. Jean-Jacques Rousseau also based legitimate rule on the people, but he stressed the general will, a collective commitment to the common good. Both challenged the idea that kings ruled simply because they were born to rule.

2 Other writers asked how a freer society might work. Montesquieu argued that dividing government power among branches could prevent abuse. Voltaire attacked religious intolerance and defended freedom of expression. Adam Smith argued that competition and voluntary trade could help an economy thrive with less government control over business. Mary Wollstonecraft demanded equal educational opportunities for women, challenging limits many male reformers accepted. Their ideas differed in focus: political power, civil liberties, markets, or women's rights, yet each questioned inherited rules.

3 Across the Atlantic, American revolutionary leaders turned some Enlightenment arguments into demands for independence. In the Declaration of Independence, they used Locke's ideas of natural rights and consent to justify breaking from Britain. Later, the United States Constitution divided national power into legislative, executive, and judicial branches, echoing Montesquieu's warning against concentrated power. These changes did not extend equal freedom to everyone. Enslaved people remained in bondage, and women lacked political equality. The gap between ideals and reality gave later reformers grounds to demand change.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How were Locke's and Rousseau's ideas about legitimate rule alike and different?

2. What different changes did Smith and Wollstonecraft seek?

3. How did Locke's ideas help American leaders justify independence?

4. How did the Constitution reflect Montesquieu's idea, and what limit to American freedom remained?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are writing a short newspaper editorial in the 1790s. In one paragraph, propose a change in American society, compare two thinkers whose ideas support it, and explain how your change would address a gap between revolutionary ideals and reality.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 9 · SS24.WH.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each thinker's main idea, then circle where an idea influenced an American document. Number one place where American society fell short of its ideals. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How were Locke's and Rousseau's ideas about legitimate rule alike and different?	**Both based legitimate rule on the people. Locke emphasized natural rights and consent; Rousseau emphasized the general will and common good.**
2	What different changes did Smith and Wollstonecraft seek?	**Smith favored more competition and voluntary trade with less government control of business. Wollstonecraft sought equal educational opportunities for women.**
3	How did Locke's ideas help American leaders justify independence?	**They used his ideas of natural rights and consent to argue that they could break from a government that violated their rights.**
4	How did the Constitution reflect Montesquieu's idea, and what limit to American freedom remained?	**The Constitution divided national power among three branches. Enslaved people remained in bondage, and women lacked political equality.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I call for schools to offer girls the same education as boys. Mary Wollstonecraft argues that women deserve equal opportunities to learn. John Locke says government should protect people's natural rights and depend on their consent. Wollstonecraft focuses on education, while Locke focuses on the source and purpose of government. Americans claim liberty, yet women lack political equality; educating girls would begin to challenge that gap.

Accept accurate comparisons in students' own words. For the editorial, look for a specific proposed change, two accurately used thinkers, a comparison, and a clear link to an unmet revolutionary ideal.