Ideas in Debate

Compare six thinkers on rights, power, and freedom

SS24.WH.1a "Compare and contrast the emerging ideas of Adam Smith, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, Mary Wollstonecraft, Montesquieu, and Voltaire."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one claim about each of the six thinkers. Mark two pairs of underlined claims with matching numbers, 1 and 2, then write S beside a similarity and D beside a difference.

Proposals for a Changing World

1 Imagine a printer in the 1700s collecting proposals for a new government. John Locke would ask whether it protects people's natural rights to life, liberty, and property. He argued that government needs the consent of the governed and that people can replace a government that violates their rights. Jean-Jacques Rousseau also located political authority with the people, but he stressed the general will, the shared interest in the common good rather than private interests. Montesquieu focused on a different danger: concentrated power. He proposed separating legislative, executive, and judicial powers so each could check the others.

2 The printer also receives arguments about whose voices are heard. Voltaire attacked religious persecution and defended freedom of expression, including the right to challenge powerful institutions. Mary Wollstonecraft pushed the debate further by arguing that women, like men, can reason and deserve serious education. She criticized a society that denied women opportunities and then treated their lack of learning as proof of inferiority. Both challenged unfair limits on people, but their targets differed: Voltaire emphasized tolerance and open criticism, while Wollstonecraft emphasized women's equal capacity and the education needed to exercise it.

3 A merchant asks the printer what these ideas mean for the marketplace. Adam Smith argued that competition and voluntary exchange could help create wealth when people were free to pursue their economic interests. Unlike a ruler who controls every sale, a government should generally allow markets to operate, though Smith still assigned it roles in defense, justice, and public works. Smith and Locke both favored limits on arbitrary government power, but Smith concentrated on economic exchange while Locke emphasized political rights and consent. Rousseau's focus on the common good raises another question: who benefits when private interests shape public decisions?

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Locke and Rousseau agree about political authority, and what did each emphasize?

2. How did Locke's and Montesquieu's ideas offer different ways to guard against abuses of government power?

3. What unfair limits did Voltaire and Wollstonecraft each challenge?

4. How did Smith's and Rousseau's ideas differ in their focus on private interests?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a new rule for an imaginary town. In five or six sentences, compare how three thinkers from the passage might judge the rule, explaining one concern they share and one important difference in their ideas.

ANSWER KEY

Ideas in Debate

GRADE 9 · SS24.WH.1a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one claim about each of the six thinkers. Mark two pairs of underlined claims with matching numbers, 1 and 2, then write S beside a similarity and D beside a difference. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Locke and Rousseau agree about political authority, and what did each emphasize?	**Both located political authority with the people. Locke emphasized consent and the protection of natural rights, while Rousseau emphasized the general will and the common good.**
2	How did Locke's and Montesquieu's ideas offer different ways to guard against abuses of government power?	**Locke held that people could replace a government that violated their rights. Montesquieu proposed separating powers so branches of government could check one another.**
3	What unfair limits did Voltaire and Wollstonecraft each challenge?	**Voltaire challenged religious persecution and limits on expression. Wollstonecraft challenged the denial of education and opportunities to women.**
4	How did Smith's and Rousseau's ideas differ in their focus on private interests?	**Smith argued that pursuing economic interests through competition and voluntary exchange could create wealth. Rousseau stressed the general will, which aims at the common good rather than private interests.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In my imaginary town, the mayor cancels council elections whenever protests begin. Locke would object because a government that ignores people's consent fails to protect their rights. Rousseau would also object, since citizens could no longer take part in choosing who makes decisions for them. Montesquieu might worry that the mayor now holds power over a council that should be able to check the mayor's actions. All three would distrust the rule, but Locke emphasizes consent and rights, Rousseau emphasizes political authority resting with the people, and Montesquieu emphasizes checks on power.

Accept other accurate comparisons supported by the passage. For Part 3, look for a plausible application of three thinkers' ideas, a shared concern, and a clear difference.