Ideas Into Independence

Trace Enlightenment ideas through revolutionary claims and choices.

SS24.WH.1b "Summarize the influence of the Enlightenment on the American Revolution."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three Enlightenment ideas in the passage. Circle an American claim or political choice influenced by each idea, then write matching numbers beside each idea and its effect.

When Ideas Challenged a King

1 In 1776, a colonial reader might find an argument about government in a pamphlet, then hear the same ideas debated at a town meeting. These arguments drew on the Enlightenment, a movement that used reason to question inherited authority. English thinker John Locke argued that people possess natural rights, including life, liberty, and property. He said a government's proper job is to protect those rights. Its authority comes from the consent of the governed, not simply from a king's family line. If a ruler repeatedly violates people's rights, Locke argued, the people may replace that government.

2 Colonists applied these ideas to their conflict with Britain. Many protested taxes imposed by Parliament, where they had no elected representatives, and objected to other British actions they believed threatened their liberties. In the Declaration of Independence, adopted in 1776, Thomas Jefferson wrote that people have rights and that governments get their powers from the consent of the governed. The document listed complaints against King George III and argued that the colonies could form independent states. Enlightenment ideas did not cause every colonial protest, but they gave revolutionaries a way to justify breaking political ties with Britain.

3 The influence did not stop at independence. French thinker Montesquieu argued that dividing government power among different branches could help prevent abuse. After the war, the U.S. Constitution placed lawmaking, enforcement, and judging in separate branches. This choice reflected Enlightenment concern about concentrated power, though the Constitution also grew from colonial experiences and political debate. There was a sharp gap between the language of rights and life in the new nation. Enslaved people remained in bondage, and women lacked equal political rights. Enlightenment principles helped shape revolutionary claims, but Americans did not apply those principles equally.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Locke's idea of natural rights help revolutionaries justify independence?

2. How did the idea of consent of the governed shape the colonists' argument against British rule?

3. How did Montesquieu's thinking influence a political choice made after independence?

4. What does the gap between the new nation's language of rights and its treatment of people show about Enlightenment influence?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are helping write rules for a newly independent state. In 70 to 90 words, propose two specific rules not named in the passage, explain how a different Enlightenment idea supports each rule, and identify one group that might still be denied rights.

ANSWER KEY

Ideas Into Independence

GRADE 9 · SS24.WH.1b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three Enlightenment ideas in the passage. Circle an American claim or political choice influenced by each idea, then write matching numbers beside each idea and its effect. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Locke's idea of natural rights help revolutionaries justify independence?	**Locke said governments must protect people's rights and may be replaced if they repeatedly violate them. Revolutionaries used complaints about threatened liberties to justify breaking from Britain.**
2	How did the idea of consent of the governed shape the colonists' argument against British rule?	**Colonists objected to taxes imposed by a Parliament in which they had no elected representatives. The Declaration argued that governments get their powers from the people's consent.**
3	How did Montesquieu's thinking influence a political choice made after independence?	**Montesquieu argued that dividing power could prevent abuse. The U.S. Constitution placed lawmaking, enforcement, and judging in separate branches.**
4	What does the gap between the new nation's language of rights and its treatment of people show about Enlightenment influence?	**Enlightenment ideas shaped revolutionary claims, but Americans did not apply those ideas equally. Enslaved people remained in bondage, and women lacked equal political rights.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our new state should publish its spending records every month so residents can question how leaders use their money. This rule follows the Enlightenment idea of consent of the governed: people cannot judge leaders if they cannot see their decisions. Judges should also explain their rulings in writing. This rule protects the natural right to liberty by making punishment harder to abuse. Yet these protections would be incomplete if enslaved people were still denied freedom.

Accept other accurate links between Enlightenment ideas and revolutionary claims or political choices. For Part 3, check that each proposed rule is specific and distinct from the passage's examples, each has a clear link to a different Enlightenment idea, and the response identifies a group that could remain excluded.