Across the Atlantic

Trace how an American victory helped spark change in France.

SS24.WH.2a "Explain how the American Revolution influenced the French Revolution."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the chain of events showing how French aid to the Americans created pressure for change in France, and circle an American political idea that French reformers used.

A Revolution Crosses the Ocean

1 In 1781, French soldiers helped American forces trap a British army at Yorktown. France had joined the American War of Independence to weaken Britain, its longtime rival. French leaders sent troops, ships, supplies, and loans across the Atlantic. The American victory showed that a king's government could be challenged, but the war also added to France's already heavy debts. By the late 1780s, paying interest on loans strained the royal budget. When King Louis XVI sought new taxes, disputes over who should pay helped lead him to call a meeting of the Estates-General in 1789.

2 Money was not the only thing crossing the Atlantic. The French officer Marquis de Lafayette fought beside American revolutionaries and later returned to France. He had seen colonists claim that government should protect rights rather than rule without the people's consent. The American Declaration of Independence said governments get their powers from the consent of the governed. It also proclaimed that all men are created equal, although slavery and limits on political participation exposed a gap between American ideals and practice. Lafayette and other French reformers drew on these ideas when they pressed for political change at home.

3 France did not simply repeat the American Revolution. The American colonists had fought to break from a distant government; the French faced a monarchy in debt and legal privileges for nobles and clergy within their own country. In 1789, representatives of the Third Estate, which represented commoners, declared themselves the National Assembly. Later that year, the assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which asserted equality before the law and national sovereignty. American success and ideas helped French reformers imagine change, while France's financial crisis and unequal social order shaped what they demanded.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did France's help in the American war contribute to a political crisis at home?

2. How did the American victory and the Declaration of Independence each give French reformers a reason to seek change?

3. How did Lafayette help connect the American Revolution to demands for change in France?

4. Why did French reformers use American ideas without simply repeating the American Revolution?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a French reformer speaking to other representatives in 1789. In 5 to 6 sentences, propose one change to France's government, explain how both the cost of helping the Americans and an American political idea support your proposal, and identify one reason France cannot simply copy the American Revolution.

ANSWER KEY

Across the Atlantic

GRADE 9 · SS24.WH.2a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the chain of events showing how French aid to the Americans created pressure for change in France, and circle an American political idea that French reformers used. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did France's help in the American war contribute to a political crisis at home?	**The aid added to France's debt. The need for new taxes led to disputes that helped bring about the Estates-General meeting.**
2	How did the American victory and the Declaration of Independence each give French reformers a reason to seek change?	**The victory showed that a king's government could be challenged. The Declaration offered the idea that government needs the people's consent.**
3	How did Lafayette help connect the American Revolution to demands for change in France?	**He fought beside American revolutionaries, returned to France, and drew on their ideas about rights and consent.**
4	Why did French reformers use American ideas without simply repeating the American Revolution?	**Americans fought to break from a distant government, while French reformers faced debt, a monarchy, and legal privileges within their own country.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Representatives, I propose that an elected assembly approve taxes. France's aid to the Americans added to royal debt, so the country needs a way to make fair decisions about raising money. The American Declaration says governments draw power from the consent of the governed, so taxpayers should have a voice. We can use that principle without copying the Americans' fight for independence. France must change its own monarchy and unequal laws, not break from a distant ruler.

Accept proposals that connect a specific change to both the war's financial cost and an American political idea. Students should distinguish France's internal problems from the colonists' fight for independence.