Ideas Behind Independence

Trace how older ideas shaped revolutionary arguments.

6-12.US1.9 "Identify the impact of multiple intellectual traditions on the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence, including early modern and Enlightenment thinkers (e.g., Locke and Montesquieu), Greek..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each thinker or political tradition named in the passage. Circle a nearby phrase that shows how each one shaped an American argument or plan.

Where Did Revolutionary Ideas Come From?

1. In 1776, colonial leaders had to explain why breaking from Britain was justified. John Locke argued that people have natural rights and that governments receive authority from the consent of the governed. If a government fails to protect those rights, people may replace it. The Declaration of Independence echoes this reasoning: it names rights, says government rests on consent, and lists the king's abuses to justify a break. Another thinker, Montesquieu, warned that concentrated power invites abuse. His case for dividing power helped revolutionaries question rule by a distant king and later influenced the design of the U.S. Constitution.

2. Colonists also looked back to ancient Greece and Rome. In ancient Athens, citizens voted directly on public decisions, though women, enslaved people, and foreigners could not vote. This example showed colonists one way citizens could govern themselves rather than obey a ruler without a voice. The Roman Republic offered a different model: citizens elected officials, and public power was divided among several offices and assemblies. American leaders drew on Rome when they argued for a republic rather than a monarchy. Neither ancient system was open to everyone, but both supplied examples for thinking about who should hold political power.

3. English history offered another set of arguments. Magna Carta placed some limits on a king's authority in 1215, at first protecting mainly powerful subjects. The English Bill of Rights of 1689 strengthened Parliament's position against the monarch. Colonists claimed the rights of English subjects, including a voice in taxation through representatives. When Parliament taxed them without colonial representatives, they called it a violation of that principle. The Declaration complains about taxes imposed without consent, linking an English political dispute to its case for independence. These traditions did not provide one finished plan; Americans combined and adapted them for a new situation.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the Declaration use Locke's ideas to justify breaking from Britain?

2. What danger did Montesquieu identify, and how did his idea affect American political thinking?

3. How did the examples of Athens and the Roman Republic offer different ways to give citizens a role in government?

4. How did an English idea about taxation become part of the Declaration's argument for independence?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a town leaving a council that makes rules without asking residents. In four or five sentences, propose a new way to govern using one idea from ancient Greece or Rome and one idea from Locke, Montesquieu, or English political history; explain how each idea addresses the town's problem and how your plan compares with the Declaration's argument.

ANSWER KEY

Ideas Behind Independence

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.US1.9

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each thinker or political tradition named in the passage. Circle a nearby phrase that shows how each one shaped an American argument or plan. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the Declaration use Locke's ideas to justify breaking from Britain?	**It says government rests on consent and names rights, then lists the king's abuses as reasons to break from his rule.**
2	What danger did Montesquieu identify, and how did his idea affect American political thinking?	**He warned that concentrated power invites abuse. His argument for dividing power helped revolutionaries question rule by a distant king and later influenced the Constitution.**
3	How did the examples of Athens and the Roman Republic offer different ways to give citizens a role in government?	**In Athens, citizens voted directly on decisions. In the Roman Republic, citizens elected officials.**
4	How did an English idea about taxation become part of the Declaration's argument for independence?	**Colonists claimed they should have a voice in taxation through representatives. The Declaration complains that taxes were imposed without their consent.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The town should elect a council whose members must face voters regularly, drawing on the Roman Republic's use of elected officials. This would give residents a voice in choosing the people who make rules. Residents should also approve a charter saying that the council governs with their consent, an idea associated with Locke. Like the Declaration, this plan treats consent as a reason to change a government, but it also explains how residents would choose the next one.

Accept other accurate connections between a named tradition and its influence. For the open task, look for two distinct ideas applied to the town and a specific comparison with the Declaration.