The Case for Independence

Weigh the Declaration's claims, evidence, and vision of government.

9-12.GOV.12 "Evaluate the arguments within the Declaration of Independence and its definition of an ideal government."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the standard for legitimate government, circle two accusations used as evidence against the king, and number the sentence that sets a limit on when revolution is justified.

How the Declaration Makes Its Case

1. Imagine a legislature that meets only when a ruler permits it. In 1776, the Declaration of Independence turned complaints about British rule into a case for separating from Britain. Its opening argument begins with a claim about political authority: people have equal rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Governments exist to secure those rights and receive their just powers from the consent of the governed. If a government repeatedly destroys that purpose, the people may change or replace it. This is an argument about what makes government legitimate, not simply a list of colonial frustrations.

2. The Declaration then tries to show that King George III had broken that standard. It charges him with dissolving representative legislatures, interfering with courts, and imposing taxes without the colonists' consent. Those examples matter because a government cannot easily claim consent while weakening representation and independent judgment. The document also says the colonists repeatedly petitioned for relief, but their petitions were answered with further injury. That detail supports its claim that separation was a response to a pattern, not a sudden reaction to one tax. Still, the accusations describe the colonists' case; readers must weigh whether the evidence justifies the conclusion.

3. The Declaration adds a caution: people should not replace longstanding governments for minor or passing reasons. It says a long pattern of abuses aimed at absolute rule can justify revolution. Taken together, its claims suggest an ideal government that protects rights, depends on public consent, and remains answerable when it fails. Yet its promise of equality did not match political reality in 1776. Enslaved people were denied liberty, and women lacked equal political rights. This gap does not erase the argument, but it gives readers a reason to test whether the proposed principles were applied consistently.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the charge that the king dissolved representative legislatures support the Declaration's claim about legitimate government?

2. Why does the account of repeated petitions strengthen the argument for separation?

3. Does the passage present the kind of evidence the Declaration says is needed to justify revolution? Explain one strength and one limit of that evidence.

4. How does one example of political reality in 1776 challenge the Declaration's vision of an ideal government?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a town council bans peaceful public meetings after residents criticize a new rule. In 80 to 100 words, argue whether residents should replace the council or seek another remedy. Use the Declaration's ideas about rights, consent, and repeated abuses, and identify one fact you would need to judge your argument.

The Case for Independence

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the standard for legitimate government, circle two accusations used as evidence against the king, and number the sentence that sets a limit on when revolution is justified. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the charge that the king dissolved representative legislatures support the Declaration's claim about legitimate government?	**Dissolving representative legislatures weakens the people's ability to give consent, which the Declaration says is the source of a government's just powers.**
2	Why does the account of repeated petitions strengthen the argument for separation?	**It suggests the colonists sought relief before separating and that the injuries continued, supporting their claim of a pattern rather than a reaction to one event.**
3	Does the passage present the kind of evidence the Declaration says is needed to justify revolution? Explain one strength and one limit of that evidence.	**Yes, it presents several accusations and says petitions failed, which supports a pattern of abuses. A limit is that the passage reports the colonists' accusations but does not independently verify them.**
4	How does one example of political reality in 1776 challenge the Declaration's vision of an ideal government?	**Enslaved people were denied liberty, contradicting the claim that people have equal rights that governments should protect. Accept the exclusion of women from equal political rights with a clear explanation.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The council's ban threatens residents' freedom to speak together and weakens their ability to influence decisions, so it conflicts with a government based on consent. However, one ban does not yet prove a long pattern of abuses. Residents should challenge the ban, petition the council, and seek a change through elections rather than immediately replacing the government. I would need to know whether the council has also punished critics or ignored earlier petitions. If it repeatedly blocks peaceful opposition, the case for replacing its members would become stronger.

Accept either position in Part 3 if the student applies rights, consent, and the need to assess repeated abuses, and identifies a relevant missing fact. For Question 3, accept other well-supported limits on what the passage establishes.