The Case for Independence

Connect the Declaration's grievances to its principles of government

9-12.GOV.2 "Examine the Declaration of Independence and American grievances against British rule."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two principles of rightful government, circle four specific grievances, and write 1 beside the sentence that explains why the delegates needed to show a pattern of abuses.

Why List the Grievances?

1. In July 1776, delegates to the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence. Its opening argues that people have rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Governments exist to protect those rights and receive their "just powers from the consent of the governed." The text says people may change or abolish a government that persistently violates their rights. It also warns that governments should not be replaced for "light and transient causes." To justify a break with Britain, the delegates therefore needed more than a complaint about one unpopular decision: they presented a pattern of abuses.

2. The Declaration lists actions attributed to King George III. It charges him with refusing approval for laws "most wholesome and necessary for the public good" and repeatedly dissolving elected colonial legislatures. It also accuses him of creating many new offices and sending officials to "harass our people." Other complaints include cutting off colonial trade, imposing taxes without colonial consent, and depriving colonists of trial by jury in many cases. The delegates grouped these charges as evidence that power was being used against the people rather than on their behalf. Their list turns political principles into a case built from specific actions.

3. The Declaration also protests that the king kept standing armies among the colonists in peacetime without their legislatures' consent and made the military independent of civil authority. The delegates say they repeatedly petitioned for relief but received further injuries instead. They do not claim that every colonist agreed with independence; they speak as representatives making a public argument. At the end, they declare that the colonies are "Free and Independent States," no longer bound politically to Britain. Read as a whole, the document asks readers to judge whether its stated principles and its list of grievances make separation justified.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the grievance about taxes without colonial consent challenge the Declaration's view of rightful government?

2. Why would repeatedly dissolving elected colonial legislatures matter to the delegates' argument for independence?

3. How does the grievance about standing armies in peacetime relate to the Declaration's concern about consent?

4. Why do the delegates mention repeated petitions before declaring independence?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose two grievances not discussed in Questions 1 to 4. In four or five sentences, argue whether they support the Declaration's claim that separation was justified, and connect each grievance to a principle in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

The Case for Independence

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.GOV.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two principles of rightful government, circle four specific grievances, and write 1 beside the sentence that explains why the delegates needed to show a pattern of abuses. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the grievance about taxes without colonial consent challenge the Declaration's view of rightful government?	**The Declaration says government receives its rightful powers from the consent of the governed. Imposing taxes without colonial consent violates that principle.**
2	Why would repeatedly dissolving elected colonial legislatures matter to the delegates' argument for independence?	**Dissolving elected legislatures removed a way for colonists to participate in government, supporting the delegates' claim that British rule lacked their consent.**
3	How does the grievance about standing armies in peacetime relate to the Declaration's concern about consent?	**The king kept standing armies among the colonists without their legislatures' consent, an example of exercising power without approval from their representatives.**
4	Why do the delegates mention repeated petitions before declaring independence?	**The petitions show that the delegates sought relief before separating. The further injuries they report support their claim that the abuses formed a continuing pattern.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Refusing to approve laws needed for the public good suggests that the king blocked government from serving the people. Sending officials to harass colonists suggests that government power harmed rather than protected them. Both actions clash with the Declaration's claim that governments exist to protect people's rights. Together, these grievances make a stronger case for separation than either would alone.

Accept arguments for or against the strength of the case for separation if they accurately identify two eligible grievances and connect each to a principle in the passage.