Why Government Exists

Read the Preamble as a statement of purposes.

9-12.GOV.6 "Describe the purposes and functions of government as outlined in the Preamble of the Constitution."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each purpose named in the Preamble. Number the examples in the passage that show how government might pursue those purposes.

Six Purposes, One Preamble

(1) In 1787, delegates drafted a Constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation, which had left the national government weak. The Preamble begins, "We the People," and states why the new government is being formed. Its six goals are to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to the people then living and their Posterity. These phrases name purposes, not a list of specific powers. The rest of the Constitution describes institutions and grants powers that can be used to pursue those goals.

(2) Imagine a flood damages a bridge linking two states. Trucks carrying food cannot cross, and leaders in each state disagree about who should pay for repairs. A national system that helps states work together serves the aim of a stronger Union. If the disagreement becomes a legal case, courts can apply law to settle it fairly, serving the aim of Justice. If protests around the bridge turn violent, government may work to restore public order, serving domestic Tranquility. These goals differ: cooperation, fair treatment under law, and peace within the country are not the same job.

(3) Now imagine a serious disease spreads through several states while a foreign military threat emerges. Coordinated efforts to protect public health can promote the general Welfare, the well-being of people across the country. National action to protect the country from an outside attack provides for the common defence. Government must also respect constitutional rights while pursuing safety. Securing the Blessings of Liberty means protecting freedoms for people today and for future generations, called Posterity. The Preamble gives these purposes, but it does not by itself authorize any particular policy. Officials must rely on powers granted elsewhere in the Constitution and obey its limits.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. In the bridge example, how would cooperation between states and a court decision serve two different Preamble purposes?

2. Which Preamble purpose fits restoring order during violent protests, and which fits protection from an outside attack? Explain the difference.

3. How can a response to disease serve the general Welfare while also requiring attention to the Blessings of Liberty?

4. What does the Preamble say about future generations, and what can it not do by itself when officials choose a policy?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a national challenge not described in the passage. In one paragraph, explain how a government response could advance two different Preamble purposes, describe a possible tension between those purposes, and explain why the Preamble alone would not authorize your proposed response.

Why Government Exists

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each purpose named in the Preamble. Number the examples in the passage that show how government might pursue those purposes. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In the bridge example, how would cooperation between states and a court decision serve two different Preamble purposes?	**Helping the states cooperate serves the goal of a stronger Union. A court applying law to settle their dispute fairly serves the goal of Justice.**
2	Which Preamble purpose fits restoring order during violent protests, and which fits protection from an outside attack? Explain the difference.	**Restoring order serves domestic Tranquility, or peace within the country. Protection from an outside attack serves the common defence.**
3	How can a response to disease serve the general Welfare while also requiring attention to the Blessings of Liberty?	**Protecting public health promotes the general Welfare. In doing so, government must also respect constitutional rights and protect freedoms.**
4	What does the Preamble say about future generations, and what can it not do by itself when officials choose a policy?	**It calls for securing the Blessings of Liberty for Posterity, or future generations. It does not by itself authorize a particular policy.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

To address a nationwide housing shortage, the federal government could offer grants to states that build affordable homes. More available housing could promote the general Welfare. Deciding who receives housing assistance through fair rules could also help establish Justice. A tension could arise if rules meant to distribute housing fairly make it harder to serve as many people as possible with limited funds. The Preamble states these purposes, but the government would need authority granted elsewhere in the Constitution to create and fund the program.

Accept other accurate explanations of the Preamble's purposes that are supported by the passage. For Your Turn, look for two distinct purposes, a plausible tension between them, and recognition that the Preamble alone does not grant policy-making power.