Ideas Meet Revolt

Weigh Enlightenment ideas against the pressures that sparked revolution.

9-12.WC.45 "Analyze the extent to which the Enlightenment influenced the American and French Revolutions."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline an Enlightenment idea used in each revolution, circle a pressure that pushed people to act in each place, and write 1 beside a limit in America and 2 beside a limit in France.

What Turned Ideas into Revolution?

1. In 1776, American colonists faced British taxes imposed without their consent. Enlightenment writers had argued that government should protect natural rights and draw its authority from the governed. The Declaration of Independence used these ideas to justify breaking with Britain, claiming people could change a government that violated their rights. Yet ideas alone did not start the war. Disputes over taxation, representation, and British military force gave colonists urgent reasons to act.

2. In France, a severe financial crisis and high bread prices sharpened anger at a system that gave the clergy and nobility special privileges. In 1789, the National Assembly issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. It proclaimed liberty and equality before the law and located political authority in the nation. Enlightenment arguments helped revolutionaries challenge inherited rank, but debt, hunger, and unequal taxes helped turn criticism into revolt.

3. The two revolutions did not apply these principles equally. The new United States did not end slavery, despite its claims about liberty. French lawmakers initially denied women equal political rights and maintained slavery in French colonies until 1794. Enlightenment language supplied a shared way to attack unjust rule, but it did not dictate who counted as free or how quickly change would come. In both places, local crises shaped when people rebelled and which reforms they pursued.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Enlightenment ideas help colonists justify independence rather than only protest taxes?

2. How did Enlightenment ideas help French revolutionaries challenge the old social order?

3. Why would it be misleading to call the American Revolution purely an Enlightenment project?

4. Why would it be misleading to call the French Revolution purely an Enlightenment project?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 90 word exhibit label comparing how much Enlightenment ideas mattered in the two revolutions. Explain one difference between their circumstances and one gap between their ideals and actions.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline an Enlightenment idea used in each revolution, circle a pressure that pushed people to act in each place, and write 1 beside a limit in America and 2 beside a limit in France. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Enlightenment ideas help colonists justify independence rather than only protest taxes?	**The colonists argued that a government must protect natural rights and get its authority from the governed, so people could change a government that violated their rights.**
2	How did Enlightenment ideas help French revolutionaries challenge the old social order?	**Ideas about liberty, equality before the law, and authority resting with the nation challenged inherited privileges for the clergy and nobility.**
3	Why would it be misleading to call the American Revolution purely an Enlightenment project?	**Taxation and British military force gave colonists immediate reasons to act. The new United States also failed to end slavery despite its claims about liberty.**
4	Why would it be misleading to call the French Revolution purely an Enlightenment project?	**Debt, high bread prices, and unequal taxes helped drive revolt. French lawmakers also initially denied women equal political rights.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Enlightenment gave both revolutions a language for challenging authority, but it did not cause either one alone. Americans used consent and natural rights to defend independence from Britain, while the French used liberty and legal equality to challenge inherited privilege. Colonial protests centered on British rule; French anger also grew from hunger and debt. Neither revolution fully honored its principles: the United States kept slavery, and French lawmakers initially withheld equal political rights from women. Ideas mattered greatly, but local crises shaped their use.

Accept different judgments about the extent of Enlightenment influence if students support them with passage evidence. For the exhibit label, look for a comparison, a difference in circumstances, and a specific gap between ideals and actions.