Promises Across Borders

Compare how two historic declarations make claims about equality.

9-10.RC.8 "Analyze U.S. and world documents of historical and literary significance, including how they address related themes and concepts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one quoted equality claim from each declaration, circle a phrase that shows each document's purpose, and number the two descriptions of how the documents are organized.

Two Declarations, Different Purposes

1 On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. Its authors announced that "all men are created equal" and that governments get their "just powers from the consent of the governed." Then the document lists complaints against King George III, including taxing colonists without their consent. Those complaints give a specific reason for breaking with Britain; the claim about equality gives that break a wider moral basis. Yet the new nation did not grant equal political rights to women or enslaved people. The distance between its principle and its practice would become a source of debate.

2 Nearly two centuries later, in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights after the devastation of World War II. Its first article says, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Instead of naming one ruler, it names rights that people everywhere should have, such as education and freedom of thought. The document arranges these rights in numbered articles, making each claim easy to locate. It is not a treaty and does not itself create enforceable law, but it offers a shared standard for judging how governments treat people.

3 Both declarations use sweeping language, but they address different audiences and problems. The 1776 document argues that certain colonies should become independent states; its grievances aim to persuade readers that a particular king has failed. The 1948 document asks nations to recognize rights across borders, even when their governments disagree. In one text, equality helps justify a political separation. In the other, equality supports a list of protections meant for every person. When readers compare the two, they can ask whose rights each document names, whom it tries to persuade, and what action its words seek to prompt.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does placing a claim about equality before the complaints against King George III strengthen the 1776 Declaration's argument?

2. How does the 1948 Declaration's use of numbered articles serve a different purpose from the 1776 Declaration's list of complaints?

3. Compare the two quoted equality claims. How does the wording of each shape the scope of its claim?

4. Why does the passage mention that women and enslaved people lacked equal political rights in the new nation? Connect this detail to the 1948 Declaration's purpose.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label of 70 to 95 words for a display containing both declarations. Explain one shared theme and one difference in purpose or audience, quote a phrase from each document, and end with a question visitors could ask about promises and practice.

ANSWER KEY

Promises Across Borders

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-10.RC.8

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one quoted equality claim from each declaration, circle a phrase that shows each document's purpose, and number the two descriptions of how the documents are organized. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does placing a claim about equality before the complaints against King George III strengthen the 1776 Declaration's argument?	**The equality claim supplies a broad moral principle, while the complaints offer specific evidence for breaking with Britain.**
2	How does the 1948 Declaration's use of numbered articles serve a different purpose from the 1776 Declaration's list of complaints?	**The numbered articles make rights easy to locate as a standard for governments everywhere. The complaints build a case against a particular king.**
3	Compare the two quoted equality claims. How does the wording of each shape the scope of its claim?	**The 1776 text says "all men," while the 1948 text says "All human beings," explicitly naming every person regardless of gender.**
4	Why does the passage mention that women and enslaved people lacked equal political rights in the new nation? Connect this detail to the 1948 Declaration's purpose.	**The detail exposes a gap between a declaration's principle and a government's practice. The 1948 document offers a standard for judging such gaps.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

These two declarations ask who deserves freedom. The 1776 Declaration says "all men are created equal," then uses complaints against a king to defend independence for the colonies. The 1948 Universal Declaration says "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights," then lists protections meant to apply across borders. One argues for a particular political break; the other sets a standard for governments everywhere. How can readers test whether a nation's actions match its promises?

Accept supported comparisons that distinguish the 1776 document's argument for independence from the 1948 document's worldwide standard for rights. In Part 3, check for 70 to 95 words, one accurate quotation from each document, and a final question about promises and practice.