Rights and Reasons

Read founding documents for ideas about rights and the common good.

USG.2.3 "Analyze and interpret central ideas on government, individual rights, and the common good in founding documents of the United States."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one claim about government's purpose in each paragraph, and circle the rights named in the passage. Number two places where protecting rights could also help the public as a whole.

What Is Government For?

1. In 1776, the Declaration of Independence made a bold claim about the purpose of government. It says people have rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that governments are created to secure those rights. It also says just powers come from "the consent of the governed." This means officials cannot claim rightful authority simply because they hold office. If a government repeatedly destroys rights, the people may change or replace it. The Declaration explained the colonies' break from Britain. It did not set up the later federal government's offices or list their powers.

2. After independence, the Constitution of 1787 set out a plan for a federal government. Its Preamble names aims that include establishing justice, providing for the common defense, promoting the general welfare, and securing the blessings of liberty. Those goals point in two directions at once: government should protect individual freedom, and it should act for the public as a whole. For example, safe harbors can benefit everyone who depends on trade, even if people disagree about how to pay for them. The Preamble states goals, but the Constitution's other sections describe government powers and limits.

3. The First Amendment, ratified in 1791 as part of the Bill of Rights, protects speech, the press, peaceful assembly, and petitions to the government. These protections give people ways to challenge officials and seek changes without first winning those officials' agreement. Imagine residents printing a leaflet that questions a proposed harbor fee. They could use speech and the press to explain why they object, then petition officials to reconsider. Their disagreement could also help officials hear concerns before making a decision that affects many people. In this way, an individual right can support the common good.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. According to the Declaration, what gives a government rightful authority, and what is that government supposed to protect?

2. How do the Declaration and the Constitution serve different purposes, according to the passage?

3. How do two goals in the Constitution's Preamble show concern for both individuals and the public as a whole?

4. How could the residents' use of First Amendment rights help people beyond those who oppose the harbor fee?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A mayor proposes reviewing all local newspaper stories about city spending before publication, saying this would prevent confusion. Write a short paragraph using ideas from the First Amendment and the Constitution's Preamble to assess the proposal. Include a possible public benefit and a risk to rights.

Rights and Reasons

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one claim about government's purpose in each paragraph, and circle the rights named in the passage. Number two places where protecting rights could also help the public as a whole. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	According to the Declaration, what gives a government rightful authority, and what is that government supposed to protect?	**Its rightful authority comes from the consent of the governed. It is supposed to secure people's rights.**
2	How do the Declaration and the Constitution serve different purposes, according to the passage?	**The Declaration explained the colonies' break from Britain; the Constitution set out a plan for the federal government.**
3	How do two goals in the Constitution's Preamble show concern for both individuals and the public as a whole?	**Securing the blessings of liberty concerns individual freedom, while promoting the general welfare concerns the public as a whole.**
4	How could the residents' use of First Amendment rights help people beyond those who oppose the harbor fee?	**Their leaflet and petition could alert officials to concerns before a decision that affects many people.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The mayor wants to prevent confusion about city spending, which could help the public make informed decisions. That goal connects to the Preamble's concern for the general welfare. But requiring the mayor to review stories before publication risks limiting the freedom of the press protected by the First Amendment. It could stop residents from learning about spending that officials would rather keep quiet. The mayor could share records and correct mistakes publicly instead of reviewing stories before they appear.

Accept interpretations supported by the passage, including other accurate pairings of Preamble goals in question 3. In Part 3, look for a distinction between a public goal and a government action that risks restricting press freedom.