Power and Promises

Read founding documents for ideas about authority, rights, and shared needs.

USH.1.1 "Analyze key documents from the Founding Era and major ideas about government, individual rights, and the general welfare embedded in these documents."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the Declaration's claim about where government power comes from, circle two rights named in the passage, and number one phrase about a public goal and one about a limit on government power.

Who Should Government Serve?

1. In 1776, a reader might have held a printed Declaration of Independence while neighbors debated whether to break from Britain. The document argued that people have "unalienable Rights" and that governments receive "their just powers from the consent of the governed." It also said people may change a government that destroys those rights. These claims offered a reason for independence, not a plan for running a new country. The promise was also incomplete in practice: slavery continued, and women could not vote in the new republic. Reading the Declaration means noticing both its claim about legitimate power and the gap between that claim and lived reality.

2. After independence, the states first operated under the Articles of Confederation. Congress could ask states for money but could not collect taxes directly, making shared needs hard to fund. The Constitution, drafted in 1787, gave Congress power to levy taxes to "provide for the common Defence and general Welfare." Its preamble also names goals such as "establish Justice" and "promote the general Welfare." These phrases link federal power to public purposes, not just to officials' wishes. At the same time, the Constitution divided power among Congress, the president, and the courts so no single branch would control the entire government.

3. Some Americans feared that the new federal government could still threaten liberty. In 1791, the Bill of Rights added limits, including the First Amendment's protection of speech and the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances. A group criticizing a federal tax could invoke those protections to argue that its members may speak and petition, even when officials dislike their message. That does not mean a petition must succeed or that every tax is invalid. Together, these documents raise a lasting question: how can a government serve shared needs while respecting the people whose authority and rights it must protect?

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. According to the Declaration, where does a government get its legitimate power? How does that idea support the people's right to change a government?

2. How did the Constitution address a problem the Articles of Confederation created for meeting shared needs?

3. Name one public goal in the Constitution and explain how its division of power limits the government pursuing that goal.

4. What could the group criticizing a federal tax claim under the First Amendment, and what would that protection not guarantee?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Congress proposes a flood-warning system for several states, but residents want to publish objections to how it would work. In four or five sentences, use two Founding Era documents from the passage to explain a public purpose and a protected right, then explain how both ideas could guide the decision.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the Declaration's claim about where government power comes from, circle two rights named in the passage, and number one phrase about a public goal and one about a limit on government power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	According to the Declaration, where does a government get its legitimate power? How does that idea support the people's right to change a government?	**Government gets its just powers from the consent of the governed. If it destroys people's rights, they may change it because its authority depends on them.**
2	How did the Constitution address a problem the Articles of Confederation created for meeting shared needs?	**Under the Articles, Congress could ask states for money but could not collect taxes directly. The Constitution gave Congress power to levy taxes for purposes including the common defense and general welfare.**
3	Name one public goal in the Constitution and explain how its division of power limits the government pursuing that goal.	**Promoting the general welfare is one public goal. Dividing power among Congress, the president, and the courts prevents any one branch from controlling the entire government.**
4	What could the group criticizing a federal tax claim under the First Amendment, and what would that protection not guarantee?	**The group could claim the right to speak against the tax and petition the government. Those rights do not guarantee that its petition will succeed or that the tax is invalid.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Constitution's goal of promoting the general welfare supports considering a flood-warning system that could protect people in several states. The Bill of Rights protects residents who speak against the plan or petition the government to change it. Officials should consider those objections rather than silence the critics. They can then decide whether the proposed system serves a shared need.

Accept accurate explanations that connect each document's idea to the question, even if students do not quote the passage. For the open task, look for two named documents, a public purpose, a protected right, and an explanation of how both apply to the proposed system.