Equality Revisited

Read two declarations together to examine how an idea changes across time.

RI.11-12.9 "Analyze 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 the equality claim in each document, circle one grievance named for each, and number the different changes the documents seek. Use your marks to compare how the two declarations connect rights to political action.

A Declaration Answers a Declaration

1. On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence to explain why thirteen colonies were breaking from Britain. Its claim that "all men are created equal" supports an argument about government: legitimate power rests on the consent of the governed. The document then lists actions attributed to King George III, including dissolving representative assemblies and imposing taxes without colonial consent. These grievances turn an abstract principle into a case for political separation. Yet the declaration does not call for equal voting rights for everyone living in the colonies. Its broad language sits beside a narrower political goal.

2. At the 1848 women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, organizers presented the Declaration of Sentiments. Its opening deliberately echoes the earlier declaration: "all men and women are created equal." Like the 1776 text, it argues that people may challenge a government that denies their rights. It also builds a list of grievances, but its complaints concern laws and customs governing women's lives. Among them are women's exclusion from voting and married women's limited control over wages they earned. Instead of declaring independence from a distant ruler, the signers demand full rights and privileges as citizens.

3. The echo between the documents is more than a borrowed sentence. Readers who recognize the 1776 declaration may hear the Seneca Falls claim as a test of the earlier document's promise: if equality justifies resistance to unjust rule, why should women lack a voice in making laws? The grievance lists sharpen that challenge. One names actions by a king to defend a break between governments; the other names restrictions within American society to demand change there. Reading both documents together reveals how a statement of universal rights can inspire reform while leaving questions about who receives those rights.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What shared idea about rights and government supports the argument in both declarations?

2. Compare one grievance from each declaration. How does each grievance support its document's argument?

3. How do the different political goals of the two declarations reflect the situations they address?

4. How does the Declaration of Sentiments change the way a reader might understand the Declaration of Independence's equality claim?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum plans to display the two equality claims but leave out both grievance lists. Write a five-sentence exhibit note explaining how that choice could mislead visitors. Include one grievance from each document, distinguish the changes they seek, and explain what visitors learn by reading the documents together.

Equality Revisited

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the equality claim in each document, circle one grievance named for each, and number the different changes the documents seek. Use your marks to compare how the two declarations connect rights to political action. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What shared idea about rights and government supports the argument in both declarations?	**Both argue that people have rights and may challenge a government that denies those rights or rules without their consent.**
2	Compare one grievance from each declaration. How does each grievance support its document's argument?	**The 1776 text cites the king's dissolution of representative assemblies as a reason to separate from Britain. The 1848 text cites women's exclusion from voting as evidence that American citizens lack equal political rights.**
3	How do the different political goals of the two declarations reflect the situations they address?	**Colonists sought to break from British rule, so the 1776 declaration defends separation. The Seneca Falls signers sought rights within the United States, so their declaration demands change in American law and society.**
4	How does the Declaration of Sentiments change the way a reader might understand the Declaration of Independence's equality claim?	**By adding women to the equality claim and naming rights denied to them, the later document exposes a gap between the earlier declaration's broad principle and who received political rights.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Displaying only the equality claims could make these declarations look as though they address the same injustice. The Declaration of Independence cites King George III's dissolution of representative assemblies to defend the colonies' separation from Britain. The Declaration of Sentiments points to women's exclusion from voting to demand rights for citizens within the United States. Its familiar wording invites readers to apply the earlier declaration's principle to people left out of political decisions. Reading the grievances alongside the claims shows that a shared idea can support different demands for change.

Accept other grievances named in the passage if students connect each to its document's goal. For the exhibit note, look for an explanation of what the omitted lists reveal, not just a restatement of the equality claims.