Ideas Behind Independence

Trace Enlightenment ideas in an American argument

8.C.1.5.B "Describe the intellectual origins of American political thought as proposed by such Enlightenment philosophers as John Locke and his theory on natural rights."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline Locke's claim about natural rights and circle his claim about the source of government power. In the final paragraph, number two places where the Declaration uses those ideas.

From Locke to the Declaration

1. In 1776, a printer in Philadelphia set type for the Declaration of Independence. Its claims about government did not appear from nowhere. During the Enlightenment, European thinkers asked what made political power legitimate. English philosopher John Locke argued that people possess natural rights simply because they are human. He named life, liberty, and property. These rights do not begin when a king grants them. Locke also said that people form governments to protect their rights. For American colonists debating independence, his ideas offered a way to judge British rule.

2. Locke argued that a just government gets its power from the consent of the governed. In his view, people agree to let leaders make and enforce laws because those laws should protect their natural rights. If a government repeatedly violates those rights instead, the people may replace it. This was not a claim that anyone could ignore a law they disliked. It was a claim about what gives a government authority and what happens when it breaks the purpose for which people formed it.

3. The Declaration of Independence put related ideas into an American political argument. It states that people have rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It says governments receive their just powers from the consent of the governed. The Declaration then charges the British king with repeated abuses and argues that the colonies may separate from Britain. Its authors did not copy Locke's exact list of rights: he emphasized property, while the Declaration names the pursuit of happiness. The document turned Enlightenment ideas into a case for independence.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does Locke's idea about where rights come from challenge the idea that a king grants people their rights?

2. How does the Declaration use Locke's idea about the source of a government's power?

3. Why did the Declaration's charges of repeated abuses matter to its argument for independence? Connect your answer to Locke's view.

4. How does the Declaration's list of rights show both Locke's influence and a difference from his ideas?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a colony where appointed rulers repeatedly ban peaceful public meetings and refuse to let residents choose representatives. In four sentences, explain how Locke's ideas about natural rights and consent could help residents judge these rulers, then describe one action residents might argue for using the Declaration's reasoning.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.1.5.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline Locke's claim about natural rights and circle his claim about the source of government power. In the final paragraph, number two places where the Declaration uses those ideas. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does Locke's idea about where rights come from challenge the idea that a king grants people their rights?	**Locke said people have natural rights because they are human, not because a king grants those rights.**
2	How does the Declaration use Locke's idea about the source of a government's power?	**Like Locke, the Declaration says government gets its just power from the consent of the governed.**
3	Why did the Declaration's charges of repeated abuses matter to its argument for independence? Connect your answer to Locke's view.	**Locke argued that people may replace a government that repeatedly violates their rights. The Declaration cited repeated abuses to support the colonies' decision to separate from Britain.**
4	How does the Declaration's list of rights show both Locke's influence and a difference from his ideas?	**Both name life and liberty as rights. Locke emphasized property, while the Declaration names the pursuit of happiness.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Locke would say that people have a natural right to liberty, which rulers do not create. Repeated bans on peaceful meetings could violate that right by limiting people's freedom to discuss government. Because residents cannot choose representatives, they could also question whether the rulers govern with their consent. Using the Declaration's reasoning, residents might call for a new government that protects their rights.

Accept answers that accurately connect natural rights and consent to the rulers' actions. For the open task, students may propose replacing the rulers or changing the government, but should link that action to repeated violations rather than a single disliked rule.