Rights Take Shape

Trace how Virginia ideas became national protections

8.C.4.5.B "Describe the influence of James Madison and the Virginia Declaration of Rights to the development of the Bill of Rights, including the significance of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom as a forerunner of the First Amendment."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle each mention of James Madison and the two Virginia documents, then underline a detail showing how each helped shape the Bill of Rights.

From Virginia to the Bill of Rights

1. In 1776, as Americans declared independence, Virginia adopted the Virginia Declaration of Rights. George Mason wrote its main draft. The declaration said people had rights that government should protect, including freedom of the press and the free exercise of religion. These were not simply favors a ruler could take away. Virginia's declaration was written for a state, not the whole country, but it offered a model: list important freedoms in writing so leaders could be held to them. That idea later shaped the national Bill of Rights.

2. Another Virginia law focused sharply on religion. Thomas Jefferson drafted the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, which became law in 1786 after James Madison helped win support for it. The statute ended state support for an official church and said people could not be forced to pay for a religion they did not choose. It also protected people from losing civil rights because of their religious beliefs. This law came before the First Amendment and showed how government could protect religious choice without promoting one faith.

3. After the U.S. Constitution was written, some Americans feared that it did not clearly protect individual freedoms. James Madison, who had helped write the Constitution, proposed amendments to Congress in 1789. He drew on protections already stated in Virginia, including those in the Virginia Declaration of Rights. He also carried forward the religious liberty principles supported by the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. In 1791, ten amendments became the Bill of Rights. Its First Amendment forbids Congress from establishing a religion or restricting its free exercise and protects the press.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Virginia Declaration of Rights provide a model for the Bill of Rights?

2. How did the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom point toward two religious protections in the First Amendment?

3. What did James Madison do to help move ideas about rights from Virginia to the national government?

4. Choose one freedom named in the Virginia Declaration of Rights. How does the First Amendment protect it?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five- or six-sentence museum label titled "From Virginia to the First Amendment." Trace the contributions of both Virginia documents and James Madison, and explain why the statute is a forerunner rather than part of the Bill of Rights.

ANSWER KEY

Rights Take Shape

GRADE 8 · 8.C.4.5.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle each mention of James Madison and the two Virginia documents, then underline a detail showing how each helped shape the Bill of Rights. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Virginia Declaration of Rights provide a model for the Bill of Rights?	**It listed freedoms that government should protect, offering a model for writing protections into national law.**
2	How did the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom point toward two religious protections in the First Amendment?	**It ended state support for an official church, pointing toward the ban on establishing a religion. It also protected people from losing civil rights because of their beliefs, pointing toward free exercise of religion.**
3	What did James Madison do to help move ideas about rights from Virginia to the national government?	**He helped win support for the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom and proposed amendments to Congress that drew on Virginia's protections.**
4	Choose one freedom named in the Virginia Declaration of Rights. How does the First Amendment protect it?	**The declaration named freedom of the press, and the First Amendment protects the press. Also accept free exercise of religion.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Virginia Declaration of Rights put freedoms, including freedom of the press, into a written list for a state. The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom then showed how a government could protect religious choice without supporting an official church. James Madison helped win support for that statute and later proposed amendments to the U.S. Constitution. He drew on Virginia's written protections as Congress considered national rights. The statute was a forerunner of the First Amendment because it became law in Virginia before the national amendment protected religious freedom.

Accept answers that connect each Virginia source to a specific national protection or to the practice of listing rights in writing. For the museum label, look for a clear distinction between the earlier Virginia statute and the later First Amendment.