Who Holds Power?

Compare equality and political participation across three founding documents.

AWH.P.2.1.A "Evaluate various significant documents from the United States of America and other nations to compare civic virtues and principles of political systems."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline where each document places political authority, circle a principle of equality in each paragraph, and number one detail in each paragraph that shows who could exercise political power or whose participation was limited.

Promises and Political Power

(1) In 1776, the American colonies faced a practical question: who could justly rule them? The United States Declaration of Independence says governments gain "their just powers from the consent of the governed." It also claims "all men are created equal" and names the king's abuses as reasons to break away. These claims value liberty and equal standing, but the document announces independence rather than setting voting rules. In the new states, voting was largely restricted to men and often tied to property. The gap between a claim about consent and actual access to the ballot matters when judging its political vision.

(2) In 1789, French revolutionaries issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen while challenging royal authority. It says "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights" and places sovereignty in "the Nation." It also says citizens may help make laws personally or through representatives. Like the American document, it rejects rule based only on a monarch's will. Yet its language about citizens did not make participation universal: women were excluded from national voting under revolutionary laws. The declaration describes a source of authority and a role for citizens, but its promise of equality was narrower in practice.

(3) After apartheid, South Africa adopted a Constitution in 1996 that begins "We, the people of South Africa" and makes the Constitution the republic's supreme law. It names human dignity, equality, nonracialism, and nonsexism as founding values. It also establishes universal adult suffrage and a multiparty system, and it gives every adult citizen the right to vote. Unlike the two earlier declarations, this Constitution sets out binding rules for government as well as broad ideals. Its voting rules make participation more explicit, while its commitment to openness and accountability offers standards for evaluating what elected officials do.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the American and French declarations differ in where they place political authority? What kind of rule do both challenge?

2. Compare each declaration's claim about equality with the voting limits described in its paragraph. What tension appears in both?

3. Which document states the clearest voting right for adult citizens? Compare its approach with one earlier declaration.

4. How does the type of document affect what you can conclude about political rights from the United States Declaration of Independence and South Africa's Constitution?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write two sentences setting voting and accountability rules for a new student council. Then write two sentences explaining how your rules use or improve on ideas from two named documents in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Who Holds Power?

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.P.2.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline where each document places political authority, circle a principle of equality in each paragraph, and number one detail in each paragraph that shows who could exercise political power or whose participation was limited. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the American and French declarations differ in where they place political authority? What kind of rule do both challenge?	**The American declaration says government gets its power from the consent of the governed; the French declaration places sovereignty in the Nation. Both challenge rule based on a monarch's will.**
2	Compare each declaration's claim about equality with the voting limits described in its paragraph. What tension appears in both?	**Both claim equality, but voting in the new American states was largely limited to men and often tied to property, while women were excluded from national voting under French revolutionary laws.**
3	Which document states the clearest voting right for adult citizens? Compare its approach with one earlier declaration.	**South Africa's Constitution gives every adult citizen the right to vote. Unlike the American Declaration of Independence, it states a voting rule rather than only a broad principle of consent.**
4	How does the type of document affect what you can conclude about political rights from the United States Declaration of Independence and South Africa's Constitution?	**The Declaration of Independence announces principles and independence but does not set voting rules. South Africa's Constitution establishes binding rules, including an explicit right for adult citizens to vote.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Every student may vote for council representatives, with one vote per person. Representatives must hold open meetings and explain their decisions to students. My voting rule follows the French Declaration's idea that citizens should take part in making laws, but it avoids the exclusion of women from voting that followed in practice. My meeting rule applies the South African Constitution's value of accountability by letting students question their representatives.

Accept comparisons that distinguish a document's stated principles from who could participate in practice. For Part 3, look for two workable rules and accurate connections to two named documents.