Promises and Power

Compare civic ideals with the systems meant to uphold them.

OKH.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 how each document describes political authority, circle a right or civic value linked to each document, and put a star beside one gap between an ideal and its use in practice.

Who Holds the Power?

1. In 1776, the American Declaration of Independence defended a break from British rule. It says people have rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that governments receive their "just powers from the consent of the governed." The writers used this claim to challenge a king they accused of violating those rights. The document names an ideal, not a plan for elections or courts. Its claim that "all men are created equal" did not end slavery, and women could not vote in most states. A principle can be powerful even when its authors fail to apply it fairly.

2. In 1789, France's Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen also challenged inherited authority. It states that people are born and remain free and equal in rights. Instead of placing power in a king, it says law expresses the "general will"; citizens may help make law directly or through representatives. This links the civic virtue of participation to a system of representative government. The declaration protects freedom of opinion, including religious views, as long as expressing them does not disturb public order under law. Yet its language about citizens did not bring women equal political rights at the time.

3. South Africa's 1996 Constitution was written after apartheid, a system that denied political rights to Black South Africans. Its preamble calls for a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights. Unlike the two earlier declarations, the constitution sets rules for governing: it names universal adult suffrage and a multiparty system as founding values, and it protects every adult citizen's right to vote. It also requires government accountability and openness and prohibits unfair discrimination, including discrimination based on race and gender. Comparing these documents means asking both what each promises and how its political system might put that promise into practice.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the American and French declarations each challenge the idea that a king should hold political power?

2. Compare the two declarations' claims about equality with what happened in practice at the time.

3. How does each document from France and South Africa connect citizens to decisions about government?

4. Compare how the American Declaration and South Africa's Constitution address the gap between stated rights and actual political power.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75 to 100 word charter proposal for a new school council. Adapt one civic principle from each of two different documents in the passage, explain how your council will put both into practice, and identify one possible gap between its promise and students' real access.

ANSWER KEY

Promises and Power

HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.P.2.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline how each document describes political authority, circle a right or civic value linked to each document, and put a star beside one gap between an ideal and its use in practice. 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 each challenge the idea that a king should hold political power?	**The American declaration says government gets its powers from the consent of the governed. The French declaration says law expresses the general will and citizens can help make it.**
2	Compare the two declarations' claims about equality with what happened in practice at the time.	**Both claim equality, but neither extended equal rights to everyone. Slavery continued and women could not vote in most U.S. states; French women did not gain equal political rights.**
3	How does each document from France and South Africa connect citizens to decisions about government?	**The French declaration says citizens may help make law directly or through representatives. South Africa's constitution protects adult citizens' voting rights and names a multiparty system as a founding value.**
4	Compare how the American Declaration and South Africa's Constitution address the gap between stated rights and actual political power.	**The American declaration states an ideal of equality but gives no plan for elections or courts, and many people lacked political rights. South Africa's constitution protects voting rights and prohibits unfair discrimination.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our school council will draw on the American Declaration's idea that authority depends on the consent of the governed and South Africa's emphasis on accountability and openness. Every student will be able to vote for council members each semester, and the council will publish meeting notes and explain how it spends its budget. Students can propose agenda items through a paper form or an online form. Voting alone may not give students with limited internet access a real voice, so the paper option and classroom voting hours will make participation easier.

Accept accurate comparisons in students' own words. For the charter, look for two correctly attributed principles, concrete ways to apply both, and a plausible gap in access.