Tracing Possible Influences

Compare biblical passages with claims in founding documents.

USG.C.2.1.B "Analyze the influence of certain Biblical texts on founding documents such as the Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details from Genesis and 1 Samuel, circle related claims in the Declaration and Constitution, and write matching numbers beside details that share an idea. Use your marks to distinguish a possible influence from proof of borrowing.

Shared Ideas, Different Documents

1. When the Declaration of Independence says "all men are created equal," it makes a political claim about rights. Genesis 1:27 says God created humankind in God's image, "male and female." Readers have connected these statements because both assign worth to people rather than to rank or ancestry. Yet the Declaration names a "Creator" without citing Genesis. Its language also draws on political philosophy and debates about natural rights. A resemblance is evidence of a possible influence, not proof that the authors copied a verse. The Declaration's promise of equality also clashed with slavery and the exclusion of women from political power.

2. In 1 Samuel 8:11-18, the prophet Samuel warns that a king will take people's sons for service, seize fields, and claim a share of their crops. The Declaration lists grievances against George III, including keeping standing armies in peacetime without colonial legislatures' consent and imposing taxes without their consent. Both texts warn that concentrated power can cost people resources and freedom. The situations are not identical: Samuel describes what an Israelite king might do, while the Declaration argues that a specific ruler violated the colonists' rights. The overlap supports a comparison, but it does not establish that the Declaration quotes Samuel.

3. The Constitution offers another place to test the comparison. Article I gives Congress, not the president, the power to lay taxes and to declare war. Article II makes the president commander in chief of the armed forces. Those divided powers can be read beside Samuel's warning about a ruler who takes resources and commands people for his own purposes. However, the Constitution does not cite 1 Samuel as its source. Its structure also reflects colonial experience and political theories about limiting government. To analyze biblical influence responsibly, identify the shared concern, specify the different solutions, and distinguish possible influence from proven borrowing.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How might Genesis 1:27 have influenced the Declaration's claim about equality? Give one detail from each text.

2. Which warning in 1 Samuel resembles a grievance in the Declaration? Explain one important difference between the texts.

3. How can the Constitution's division of powers be read as a response to the concern in 1 Samuel 8? Use two constitutional powers named in the passage.

4. Why does the passage treat similarities between biblical texts and founding documents as possible influence rather than proof of copying?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence curator's note judging whether the Declaration and Constitution use the same biblical idea in the same way. Refer to Genesis, 1 Samuel, and one detail from each founding document, then state one limit on what the similarities prove.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.2.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details from Genesis and 1 Samuel, circle related claims in the Declaration and Constitution, and write matching numbers beside details that share an idea. Use your marks to distinguish a possible influence from proof of borrowing. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How might Genesis 1:27 have influenced the Declaration's claim about equality? Give one detail from each text.	**Genesis says humankind is created in God's image; the Declaration says all men are created equal. Both assign worth to people, though the passage does not establish direct borrowing.**
2	Which warning in 1 Samuel resembles a grievance in the Declaration? Explain one important difference between the texts.	**Samuel warns that a king will take a share of crops; the Declaration objects to taxes imposed without consent. Samuel warns about a king's possible actions, while the Declaration charges George III with specific abuses.**
3	How can the Constitution's division of powers be read as a response to the concern in 1 Samuel 8? Use two constitutional powers named in the passage.	**Samuel warns about a ruler who takes resources and commands people. The Constitution gives Congress the power to lay taxes and declare war, rather than giving those powers to the president.**
4	Why does the passage treat similarities between biblical texts and founding documents as possible influence rather than proof of copying?	**The founding documents do not cite the biblical passages discussed, and their ideas also reflect political philosophy or colonial experience.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Declaration and Constitution can be compared with biblical texts, but they do not use the same idea in the same way. Genesis says humankind is created in God's image, while the Declaration claims that all men are created equal. First Samuel warns that a king will take people's resources, while the Constitution gives Congress the power to lay taxes. These connections suggest possible influence, but neither founding document cites the biblical passage discussed here.

Accept other accurate pairings from the passage, including Samuel's warning about service and the Declaration's standing-army grievance. Students should distinguish a shared idea from evidence of direct borrowing.