Who Gives Power?

Read the Declaration's grievances as an argument for self-rule.

USG.C.2.1.E "Examine the Declaration of Independence and its grievances to explain the principle of self-rule as based on the consent of the governed and as exercised through representative government."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the Declaration's claim about where government power comes from. Circle two grievances, then number the explanations of how each one cuts people off from representation.

When Representation Breaks Down

1. In 1776, the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence after more than a year of war with Britain. The document argues that governments receive their "just powers from the consent of the governed." In other words, political authority begins with people, not with a king's family line. The Declaration says people may change or end a government that repeatedly violates their rights. It does not treat a single disliked decision as enough reason for revolution. Its list of grievances aims to show a persistent pattern of abuses, giving readers evidence for the colonies' decision to separate.

2. One grievance says the king had dissolved "Representative Houses repeatedly." Colonists elected members to colonial assemblies, which debated laws and spoke for local voters. When the king dissolved an assembly for resisting his policies, those voters lost a way to influence government. Another grievance says he had refused to allow new elections after dissolving such bodies. The Declaration argues that a government cannot claim to listen to its people while blocking the representatives they choose. These complaints link self-rule to more than a promise of rights: people need working institutions through which their consent can shape public decisions.

3. The Declaration also objects to "imposing Taxes on us without our Consent." Colonists did not elect members of Britain's Parliament, which approved taxes affecting them. British officials argued that Parliament represented all British subjects, including colonists, but many colonists rejected that claim. Taken together, the tax and assembly grievances make a specific argument: a government loses legitimacy when it demands obedience while cutting people off from meaningful representation. The Declaration announced separation, but it did not set up a new national voting system. Creating institutions that could carry out self-rule remained a task for the new states and, later, the United States.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did dissolving colonial assemblies interfere with government by consent?

2. Why did refusing new elections make the dissolved assemblies grievance more serious?

3. How did the colonists' view of representation challenge Britain's defense of parliamentary taxes?

4. Why does the passage distinguish a pattern of abuses from a single disliked decision when explaining separation?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a town mayor stops the elected council from meeting and makes town rules alone. Write a 70 to 90 word public statement explaining the problem using consent and representation, proposing two specific ways to restore self-rule, and explaining why an unpopular rule alone would not prove that consent is gone.

ANSWER KEY

Who Gives Power?

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.2.1.E

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the Declaration's claim about where government power comes from. Circle two grievances, then number the explanations of how each one cuts people off from representation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did dissolving colonial assemblies interfere with government by consent?	**It took away voters' way to influence laws through the assembly members they had elected.**
2	Why did refusing new elections make the dissolved assemblies grievance more serious?	**Voters could not choose new representatives to restore their voice in government.**
3	How did the colonists' view of representation challenge Britain's defense of parliamentary taxes?	**British officials said Parliament represented colonists, but colonists had not elected its members and rejected that claim of representation.**
4	Why does the passage distinguish a pattern of abuses from a single disliked decision when explaining separation?	**The Declaration uses repeated abuses to argue that the government had lost legitimacy, not that any unpopular decision justified separation.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Neighbors, the mayor has stopped our elected council from meeting and is making town rules alone. Even if some rules are popular, voters cannot guide decisions through the people they chose to represent them. The mayor should reopen council meetings and let council members vote on proposed rules. Residents should also be able to question their representatives at those meetings. An unpopular rule alone would not prove that consent is gone; blocking our council is the deeper problem.

Accept answers that connect each grievance to a loss of meaningful representation, even if students use different wording. For Part 3, look for two concrete ways to restore representative decision-making and a distinction between disagreement with a rule and loss of consent.