Whose Voice Counts?

Deliberating how founding principles apply at a town meeting

USG.C.8.2.C "Explain how civic virtue and a shared American civic identity are achieved through the deliberation about the meaning and application of our Founding documents."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline founding principles, circle the different ways residents apply them, and number two actions that show civic virtue. Use your marks to trace how discussion can build a shared civic identity.

A Minute to Speak

1. At a town council meeting, a proposed rule would cut each speaker's public-comment time from three minutes to one. The council says shorter turns would let more neighbors speak before the meeting ends. Some residents worry that one minute is too little to explain a problem, especially if they need an interpreter. Others have jobs or caregiving duties and cannot stay late for a second meeting. The dispute is not simply about a clock. It asks how a public institution can hear people fairly when their needs differ. Residents turn to the nation's founding documents for principles, not an automatic answer.

2. The Declaration of Independence says that "all men are created equal" and that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. The First Amendment to the Constitution protects freedom of speech and the right to petition the government. Neither document specifies how many minutes a speaker must receive at a council meeting. One neighbor argues that equal one-minute turns protect access for people at the end of the line. Another replies that meaningful participation may require more time or interpretation. Both use founding principles to test the rule, rather than treating their preferred plan as the only patriotic choice.

3. The discussion changes when residents remember that the founding promise of equality was not fully honored at the founding. Women and enslaved people were denied political rights, and later generations pressed to expand participation. At this meeting, speakers listen without interrupting, explain whom each rule might leave out, and suggest a common one-minute limit plus an option to submit longer written comments. They also ask the council to consider interpretation support. They do not all agree, but they practice civic virtue by weighing others' needs. Their shared civic identity grows through working to apply founding principles more fairly, not through having identical experiences.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the two neighbors apply founding principles differently to the one-minute rule?

2. Why does the First Amendment help residents discuss the rule without settling the exact time limit?

3. How does remembering who lacked political rights at the founding change what residents consider?

4. Which actions at the meeting show civic virtue, and how can those actions build a shared civic identity?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a school board decides to accept only online public comments. In four or five sentences, apply a founding principle from the passage, explain two perspectives on the rule, propose a fair response, and show how discussing it could build civic virtue and a shared civic identity.

ANSWER KEY

Whose Voice Counts?

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.8.2.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline founding principles, circle the different ways residents apply them, and number two actions that show civic virtue. Use your marks to trace how discussion can build a shared civic identity. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the two neighbors apply founding principles differently to the one-minute rule?	**One sees equal one-minute turns as a way to let more people speak. The other argues that meaningful participation may require more time or interpretation.**
2	Why does the First Amendment help residents discuss the rule without settling the exact time limit?	**It protects speech and petition, but it does not specify how many minutes a speaker receives at a council meeting.**
3	How does remembering who lacked political rights at the founding change what residents consider?	**It leads them to consider whom the proposed rule might leave out and how to apply the promise of equality more fairly.**
4	Which actions at the meeting show civic virtue, and how can those actions build a shared civic identity?	**Residents listen, weigh others' needs, and propose ways for more people to participate. Working together to apply founding principles helps them see themselves as members of a shared civic community.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

If a school board accepts only online comments, some families can respond quickly, but others may lack reliable internet. The Declaration's principle of government by consent suggests that officials should consider whether the rule lets affected people be heard. A board member might favor online comments because they are easy to collect, while a parent might ask for paper submissions. I would offer both methods and make the same deadline apply to everyone. Listening to these concerns shows civic virtue and helps families see themselves as participants in a shared civic life.

Accept different fair proposals if students connect a founding principle to two perspectives and explain how deliberation supports both civic virtue and shared civic identity. Do not require students to treat a specific public-comment format as a constitutional right.