# Follow the Evidence

Use public records and civic action to examine an elected official's choices.

**USG.C.8.3** "Analyze how our system of government provides citizens with opportunities to monitor and influence government as a means to hold elected officials accountable..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline two ways the students check government claims, circle two First Amendment freedoms they use, and write 1, 2, and 3 beside the steps from gathering evidence to asking for action to voting.

### The Bridge Inspection Question

1. After a bridge in a neighboring county closes, students in Harbor City notice that trucks now crowd the road beside their school. Congress is considering a bill that would fund more bridge inspections nationwide. Their U.S. representative says the bill costs too much, but the students want to know whether federal records show a serious problem. They check the representative's public statements and find the bill's text and the representative's past votes on bridge funding on official congressional websites. Comparing those sources lets them test the representative's claim instead of relying on a campaign slogan.

2. The students also request existing inspection-related records from the Federal Highway Administration under the Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA. This federal law allows people to request records from federal executive agencies, though some information can legally be withheld. FOIA does not force an agency to create a new report or give access to every record. Meanwhile, the First Amendment protects speech, press, peaceful assembly, and petitions to the government. These protections let students discuss what they learn, publish their findings, meet peacefully, and ask officials for action without being punished by the government for their viewpoint.

3. When the agency releases inspection summaries, the students find that several bridges in their region are listed for follow-up reviews. That finding does not prove the proposed bill would fix every bridge, but it gives the students a specific question to raise. They write their representative asking how the bill would improve inspections and requesting an explanation of the representative's position. They also share the summaries at a peaceful rally. Eligible voters can weigh the representative's actions at the next election. Records, public discussion, direct requests, and voting connect evidence to public pressure and electoral accountability.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does comparing the bill's text with the representative's statements help the students monitor their representative?

2. How do FOIA and the First Amendment serve different parts of the students' plan?

3. Why do the inspection summaries support a question to the representative but not prove that the bill is the right solution?

4. How can the students' letter and a later election hold the representative accountable in different ways?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine residents hear that a federal agency has stopped testing air near their town while their U.S. representative supports cutting its budget. In 3 to 4 sentences, propose a legal way to check the claim, use a constitutional freedom to share evidence or ask for change, and explain how voters could hold the representative accountable.

**ANSWER KEY**

# Follow the Evidence

**HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.8.3**

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways the students check government claims, circle two First Amendment freedoms they use, and write 1, 2, and 3 beside the steps from gathering evidence to asking for action to voting. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How does comparing the bill's text with the representative's statements help the students monitor their representative? | **It helps them check whether the representative's description matches the proposed bill instead of accepting a campaign claim.** |
| 2 | How do FOIA and the First Amendment serve different parts of the students' plan? | **FOIA lets them request existing federal agency records. The First Amendment protects their ability to discuss the records, share findings, assemble peacefully, and petition officials.** |
| 3 | Why do the inspection summaries support a question to the representative but not prove that the bill is the right solution? | **The summaries identify bridges needing follow-up reviews, but they do not show that the proposed bill would fix those bridges.** |
| 4 | How can the students' letter and a later election hold the representative accountable in different ways? | **The letter asks the representative to explain a position using evidence. At the election, eligible voters can consider the representative's actions when deciding whether to keep that person in office.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would request existing air-monitoring records from the federal agency under FOIA and compare them with its public announcements. If the records show that testing stopped, I would use my First Amendment right to petition by writing my representative with the evidence and asking why they support the cut. I would share the representative's reply with eligible voters so they can consider it at the next election.

Accept other legal ways to verify the claim and exercise a First Amendment freedom. Responses should connect evidence to a specific request or public action and explain how voters can evaluate the representative.