Promises and Polls

Compare what constitutions promise with what their voting rules say.

USG.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 a civic goal in each constitution, circle each detail about who can vote, and number the historical limits on voting. Use your marks to compare the documents' promises and rules.

Who Counts at the Polls?

1. The U.S. Constitution opens with "We the People" and promises to "establish Justice" and "promote the general Welfare." Its first article places lawmaking in a Congress, with House members chosen by voters in each state. Yet the original Constitution did not set one nationwide rule for who could vote for those members. It linked voter qualifications to rules used for each state's larger legislative chamber. Imagine standing outside a polling place in the early United States: the preamble's broad language did not, by itself, tell you whether you could cast a ballot.

2. After apartheid, a system of legally enforced racial separation, South Africa adopted a new Constitution in 1996. Its preamble calls on the nation to "Heal the divisions of the past" and build a society founded on democratic values and human rights. Its founding values include "non-racialism and non-sexism" and "universal adult suffrage." A separate provision gives every adult citizen the right to vote in elections for legislative bodies. Picture a line outside a polling station: this document states a rule about who may enter, not just a hope about justice.

3. At a polling place, written rights and lived practice can diverge. In the early United States, states generally barred women from voting, and enslaved people could not vote. Under apartheid in South Africa, most Black citizens were excluded from national elections. When comparing founding documents, look beyond an inspiring opening line: check specific rules about participation and the history surrounding the text. Ask what citizens are urged to value, what political power the document distributes, and what its words leave uncertain. A constitutional promise can guide change even when a government has not fulfilled it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What shared civic responsibility do the two preambles suggest? Support your inference with a phrase from each.

2. How does each constitution address who can vote? Give one detail from each document.

3. Which constitution states a more explicit rule against excluding adults from voting? Give two details that support your judgment.

4. How does each country's history make its constitution's voting language significant? Include one historical detail about each country.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write 5 to 6 sentences advising a school council on an election rule and a civic virtue for its charter. Use one detail from each constitution to compare how well their approaches would serve your school.

ANSWER KEY

Promises and Polls

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.P.2.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline a civic goal in each constitution, circle each detail about who can vote, and number the historical limits on voting. Use your marks to compare the documents' promises and rules. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What shared civic responsibility do the two preambles suggest? Support your inference with a phrase from each.	**Both suggest a responsibility to build a fair society. The U.S. preamble calls for "establish Justice," while South Africa's calls for healing past divisions.**
2	How does each constitution address who can vote? Give one detail from each document.	**The original U.S. Constitution tied House voter qualifications to state legislative voting rules. South Africa's Constitution names universal adult suffrage and gives every adult citizen the right to vote in legislative elections.**
3	Which constitution states a more explicit rule against excluding adults from voting? Give two details that support your judgment.	**South Africa's Constitution is more explicit. It names "universal adult suffrage" and gives every adult citizen the right to vote in legislative elections.**
4	How does each country's history make its constitution's voting language significant? Include one historical detail about each country.	**The U.S. preamble used broad language, although states generally barred women from voting and enslaved people could not vote. South Africa's explicit voting rights followed apartheid, which excluded most Black citizens from national elections.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our school council charter should let every enrolled student vote by secret ballot, regardless of grade or club membership. The U.S. Constitution's call to "promote the general Welfare" supports considering the needs of the whole school, but its original voting rules left eligibility to other authorities. South Africa's Constitution names "universal adult suffrage," a clearer model for stating who can participate, although our students need not be adults. We should also name respectful listening as a civic virtue so losing candidates still have a voice in council discussions. A clear voting rule and a shared habit could make representation more than a slogan.

Accept well-supported inferences about justice, inclusion, or responsibility in question 1. For the open task, look for a workable school voting rule, a civic virtue, and a meaningful comparison using a detail from each constitution.