Principles That Endure

Read Calvin Coolidge's 1926 reflections on the Declaration of Independence.

USH.C.4.1.D "Describe Calvin Coolidge's reflections in his 1926 address on the 150th anniversary of the United States of America's independence regarding the principles of the Declaration of Independence, natural rights, equality..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline a sentence about equality or natural rights, circle a sentence about consent of the governed, and number two sentences that connect moral belief to self-government. Use your marks to trace how Coolidge linked the Declaration's principles.

What Sustains Independence?

1. On July 5, 1926, President Calvin Coolidge spoke in Philadelphia during the 150th anniversary celebration of American independence. He asked listeners to look past the celebration and consider the Declaration of Independence as a statement of lasting principles. Its claims, he argued, were not simply complaints against a British king. The Declaration said that people are created equal, possess rights that government does not grant, and may form governments that receive their just powers from the consent of the governed. For Coolidge, these ideas remained a test of what American government should be, even long after the Revolution.

2. When Coolidge repeated the Declaration's claim that all are created equal, he treated it as an enduring principle, not a measurement of people's wealth or talents. He also described rights as inalienable: government must respect them because people possess them by nature, not because officials hand them out. In his view, voting alone could not make the denial of those rights just. Coolidge insisted that the Declaration's basic propositions could not be improved upon by later political fashion. New policies might change, but the foundation for judging them should remain firm.

3. Coolidge called the Declaration a "great spiritual document." He said its ideas of equality, liberty, and popular sovereignty had roots in religious convictions, including beliefs taught by colonial clergy. Rights and consent were more than rules written on paper: they depended, in his account, on people believing that human dignity had a source beyond government. Coolidge warned that if Americans lost faith in those convictions, the Declaration's principles would perish. His warning tied self-government to a moral duty: citizens and leaders must honor the rights of others even when doing so is inconvenient.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did Coolidge consider the Declaration's principles important in 1926, long after independence?

2. How did Coolidge's view of natural rights place a limit on what government may do?

3. How do equality and consent of the governed work together in the account of Coolidge's ideas?

4. Why did Coolidge believe religious convictions mattered to the Declaration's principles?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a town council wins an election and then proposes a rule banning peaceful criticism of its decisions. Write one paragraph of 80 to 105 words explaining how Coolidge might judge the proposal. Use equality, natural rights, consent, and moral belief, and distinguish an election from unlimited power.

ANSWER KEY

Principles That Endure

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.4.1.D

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline a sentence about equality or natural rights, circle a sentence about consent of the governed, and number two sentences that connect moral belief to self-government. Use your marks to trace how Coolidge linked the Declaration's principles. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did Coolidge consider the Declaration's principles important in 1926, long after independence?	**He considered them lasting principles for judging what American government should be, not just complaints from the Revolution.**
2	How did Coolidge's view of natural rights place a limit on what government may do?	**People possess rights by nature rather than receiving them from officials, so a government must respect those rights even if a vote favors denying them.**
3	How do equality and consent of the governed work together in the account of Coolidge's ideas?	**People are equal rather than naturally subject to a ruler, so a government's just powers must come from their consent.**
4	Why did Coolidge believe religious convictions mattered to the Declaration's principles?	**He saw those convictions as the source of ideals such as equality and liberty, and warned that the principles would perish if Americans lost faith in them.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Coolidge would likely oppose the council's rule even though its members won an election. The Declaration's principle of equality gives no elected leader a natural claim to silence other people. Natural rights belong to people before governments exist, so a vote cannot make their denial just. Consent gives officials authority to govern, but it does not give them unlimited power over citizens. Coolidge would also ask whether the council honored the moral belief that human dignity comes from beyond government. Banning peaceful criticism would weaken the principles that make self-government worthy of public trust.

Accept explanations that accurately connect Coolidge's principles, even if students use different wording. For Part 3, look for an application of all four requested ideas, not a claim that Coolidge addressed this specific town rule.