Access Becomes Law

How the ADA changed access to everyday life

USH.C.8.3.C "Describe the significance of passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two examples of exclusion before the ADA, circle three duties the law created, and number two sentences that explain why its passage mattered.

A Civil Rights Law for Access

1 In 1990, a person who used a wheelchair might have found that a city bus had no lift, a courthouse had only stairs, and a job interview never happened because an employer assumed disability meant inability. These were not isolated inconveniences. Barriers kept people from earning wages, using public services, and taking part in community life. Disability rights activists organized protests and pressed Congress for a national law that would treat exclusion as a civil rights issue. On July 26, 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA.

2 The ADA barred discrimination against qualified people with disabilities in employment and required employers to provide reasonable accommodations unless doing so caused undue hardship. It also required state and local governments to make their services accessible. Businesses open to the public, such as stores and restaurants, could not exclude customers because of disability and had to remove certain physical barriers when doing so was readily achievable. Public transportation systems faced accessibility rules as well. The law addressed obstacles in several parts of daily life, not just one doorway or one workplace. Its requirements made equal access a legal duty rather than a favor.

3 Consider a town hall meeting held in a room reached only by stairs. After the ADA, the town could not simply claim that residents with disabilities were welcome while leaving the meeting inaccessible. It had to give them meaningful access to its services, which might mean moving the meeting to an accessible room. This change mattered because public decisions affect everyone. The ADA did not erase every barrier overnight: people still had to identify violations, and institutions had to change practices. But its passage gave people a nationwide legal tool to challenge exclusion and expanded opportunities to work, travel, and participate in public life.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why was the passage of the ADA significant for people who had been shut out of jobs and public places?

2. How did the ADA change an employer's responsibility toward a qualified applicant with a disability?

3. Why would saying 'everyone is welcome' not be enough for the town hall meeting described in the passage?

4. Why does the passage say the ADA was significant even though it did not erase every barrier overnight?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a new movie theater opens in your town. In four sentences, describe two ways it could make its building or services accessible, and explain how those changes serve the ADA's broader purpose.

ANSWER KEY

Access Becomes Law

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.8.3.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two examples of exclusion before the ADA, circle three duties the law created, and number two sentences that explain why its passage mattered. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why was the passage of the ADA significant for people who had been shut out of jobs and public places?	**It made discrimination and certain barriers legal issues, giving people protections in employment and places open to the public.**
2	How did the ADA change an employer's responsibility toward a qualified applicant with a disability?	**The employer could not discriminate because of disability and had to provide reasonable accommodations unless doing so caused undue hardship.**
3	Why would saying 'everyone is welcome' not be enough for the town hall meeting described in the passage?	**The town had to provide meaningful access to its services, perhaps by moving the meeting to an accessible room.**
4	Why does the passage say the ADA was significant even though it did not erase every barrier overnight?	**It gave people a nationwide legal tool to challenge exclusion and expanded opportunities to work, travel, and participate in public life.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The theater could provide a step-free entrance so wheelchair users can enter with other customers. It could also offer accessible seating inside its screening rooms. These changes make access part of how the business operates, not a favor granted to one customer. They support the ADA's broader purpose of allowing people with disabilities to participate in public life.

Accept other accurate examples of accessible theater features or services. Responses should connect specific changes to equal access, not merely name features.