Promises and Power

Compare civic principles in three founding documents.

WG.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 one civic principle in each paragraph, circle words that show who is included or protected, and number two places where a document's promise differs from another document's rule or from historical practice.

Who Is Included in the Promise?

1. In 1776, the U.S. Declaration of Independence argued that governments get "their just powers from the consent of the governed." It also claimed that "all men are created equal" and that people may change a government that violates their rights. These claims made consent and resistance to unjust rule central civic principles. Yet the Declaration did not set voting rules or create a system of courts to enforce equality. Many people, including enslaved people and women, lacked political power in the new nation. When evaluating the Declaration, separate its bold standard for legitimate government from the limited participation of its era.

2. The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1868, addresses a different question: what must states do under law? It says that no state may deny "any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." Unlike the Declaration's broad claim, this rule places a legal limit on state governments. Its wording covers persons, not only voters or citizens, but it does not itself promise every adult the vote. Ratified after the Civil War, it provided a constitutional basis for challenging unequal state action. The gap between a legal guarantee and its enforcement remains important when judging a political system.

3. South Africa's Constitution, adopted in 1996 after apartheid, names "non-racialism and non-sexism" and "universal adult suffrage" among the republic's founding values. It also protects the right of every adult citizen to vote in elections for a legislative body. These provisions respond to a past system that denied political power to most Black South Africans. Like the Fourteenth Amendment, this constitution uses legal rules rather than only a statement of ideals. Unlike that amendment, it explicitly makes adult citizens' voting rights part of its design. A comparison should ask both what each text promises and who can use that promise.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the Declaration and the Fourteenth Amendment differ in the way they address equality?

2. The Declaration says government depends on consent. How does South Africa's Constitution give a more specific rule for political participation?

3. Compare whom the Fourteenth Amendment protects with whom South Africa's Constitution gives a voting right. Why does that difference matter?

4. A reader claims these documents prove their nations always lived up to their stated principles. Use historical context from two paragraphs to evaluate that claim.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a rule for a new student council about who gets a vote or how council decisions must treat students. In 4 to 5 sentences, connect your rule to principles from two different documents in the passage, explain your choice, and name one question you would ask to check whether the rule works fairly.

ANSWER KEY

Promises and Power

HIGH SCHOOL · WG.P.2.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one civic principle in each paragraph, circle words that show who is included or protected, and number two places where a document's promise differs from another document's rule or from historical practice. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the Declaration and the Fourteenth Amendment differ in the way they address equality?	**The Declaration states a broad ideal of equality but sets no rules for enforcing it. The Fourteenth Amendment legally bars states from denying equal protection to people within their jurisdiction.**
2	The Declaration says government depends on consent. How does South Africa's Constitution give a more specific rule for political participation?	**The Declaration does not say who may vote. South Africa's Constitution explicitly protects voting by every adult citizen in elections for a legislative body.**
3	Compare whom the Fourteenth Amendment protects with whom South Africa's Constitution gives a voting right. Why does that difference matter?	**The amendment's equal-protection rule covers any person within a state's jurisdiction. South Africa's stated voting right belongs to adult citizens, so the two protections apply to different groups and different rights.**
4	A reader claims these documents prove their nations always lived up to their stated principles. Use historical context from two paragraphs to evaluate that claim.	**The claim is unsupported. Many enslaved people and women lacked political power despite the Declaration's ideals, and South Africa's voting provisions followed apartheid, which denied political power to most Black South Africans.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My rule would let every enrolled student vote for student council, regardless of grade. South Africa's Constitution makes adult citizens' voting rights explicit, while the Declaration links government to the consent of the governed. I would apply those principles more broadly at school because council rules affect all students. I would check whether students in every grade can actually reach the ballot and cast a vote.

Accept accurate comparisons that distinguish a stated ideal from a legal rule and identify the groups named in each text. For the open task, the proposed rule may differ from the sample if its links to two documents and its fairness check are clear.