A Promise Revisited

Compare how two declarations use the same ideals to demand different changes.

9-10.RI.9 "Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance, including how they address related themes and concepts. Compare the approaches of two or more authors."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one phrase about consent or equality from each declaration, circle words in the 1848 declaration that echo the 1776 declaration, and number two differences in the changes each group seeks.

Who Counts as the Governed?

1 In July 1776, representatives of thirteen colonies issued the Declaration of Independence, largely drafted by Thomas Jefferson. It argues that governments gain their rightful power from "the consent of the governed." When a government destroys people's rights, the people may replace it. The declaration charges King George III with abuses, including taxes imposed without the colonists' consent. Its audience included other nations whose support the colonies sought, as well as people in the colonies. Its sweeping claim that "all men are created equal" gave the rebellion a moral basis, even though the new nation did not grant equal political rights to everyone.

2 Seventy-two years later, women gathered at a convention in Seneca Falls, New York. Elizabeth Cady Stanton helped draft its Declaration of Sentiments, which begins, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal." The added words "and women" challenge readers to apply the earlier declaration's promise more broadly. Like the 1776 document, the 1848 declaration lists grievances. One says, "He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise." In plain terms, women were denied the vote. The convention demanded changes to laws and customs, not independence from another country.

3 Both declarations turn a complaint into a public argument by stating a principle first, then pointing to violations. Yet their targets and solutions differ. The 1776 authors accuse a king of ruling the colonies unjustly and defend breaking political ties with Britain. Stanton and her fellow signers accuse men and institutions within the United States of denying women equal standing; they call for reform within that country. Borrowing a familiar structure makes the later argument harder to dismiss: readers who accept consent as the basis of government must consider why women lack a voice in making it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the Declaration of Sentiments change the Declaration of Independence's claim about equality, and why does that change matter to its argument?

2. Both declarations list grievances. Compare one grievance from each and explain how it supports that document's larger goal.

3. How do the groups accused of denying rights differ in the two declarations, and how does that difference shape the change each document seeks?

4. Why might the authors of the Declaration of Sentiments have borrowed the earlier declaration's words and structure instead of presenting an entirely new kind of argument?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

An exhibit is titled “Who Counts as the Governed?” Write one paragraph recommending which declaration should appear first. Compare how both documents use the idea of consent, include one specific detail from each, and explain why your choice better fits the exhibit title.

ANSWER KEY

A Promise Revisited

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one phrase about consent or equality from each declaration, circle words in the 1848 declaration that echo the 1776 declaration, and number two differences in the changes each group seeks. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the Declaration of Sentiments change the Declaration of Independence's claim about equality, and why does that change matter to its argument?	**It adds "and women" to the claim that all men are created equal, making women's equality part of the principle used to argue for reform.**
2	Both declarations list grievances. Compare one grievance from each and explain how it supports that document's larger goal.	**The 1776 declaration cites taxes imposed without colonists' consent to support independence from Britain. The 1848 declaration cites women's exclusion from voting to support changes to U.S. laws and customs.**
3	How do the groups accused of denying rights differ in the two declarations, and how does that difference shape the change each document seeks?	**The 1776 authors accuse King George III and seek to break ties with Britain. Stanton and her fellow signers accuse men and U.S. institutions and seek reform within the United States.**
4	Why might the authors of the Declaration of Sentiments have borrowed the earlier declaration's words and structure instead of presenting an entirely new kind of argument?	**The familiar words and structure invite readers who accept the 1776 declaration's principles of equality and consent to consider whether those principles should apply to women.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Declaration of Sentiments should appear first because it asks visitors to test a familiar political promise. The Declaration of Independence says governments draw power from "the consent of the governed," yet its authors use that principle to defend the colonies' separation from Britain. Stanton and her fellow signers apply the same idea to women's exclusion from voting. Their grievance about the "elective franchise" asks whether a government can claim women's consent when women cannot vote. Starting with that question would make the exhibit title a challenge for visitors to consider as they read both documents.

Accept either declaration as the recommended opening if the response compares their uses of consent, cites an accurate detail from each, and explains how the choice serves the exhibit title.