

Name _____

The Fundamental Principles of the Declaration of Independence

Short Answer Key

1. The concept of natural rights in the Declaration of Independence is significant because it asserts that all individuals possess inherent rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These rights are considered unalienable and cannot be taken away by any government. The idea shapes the document's overall message by emphasizing the importance of protecting these rights and justifying the American colonies' quest for independence based on the violation of these rights by British rule.
2. The principle of government by consent highlighted in the declaration emphasizes that legitimate governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. This means that governments are established with the approval and agreement of the people they govern. This principle contributes to the establishment of democratic governance, where citizens have the right to choose their leaders through elections, and it defines the relationship between citizens and their government as one based on mutual agreement.
3. The declaration emphasizes the right to revolution by stating that when a government becomes destructive of the people's rights and no longer serves their interests, the people have the right to alter or abolish it and institute a new government. This principle articulates the circumstances under which the people have the right to take action against an oppressive government. It is significant in the context of the American Revolution because it provided a moral and philosophical foundation for the colonists' resistance to British rule and their quest for independence.
4. The ideal of equality is implicit in the declaration's principles. While it is not explicitly mentioned, the emphasis on natural rights, government by consent, and the right to revolution contributes to the concept of equality. Natural rights assert that all individuals possess the same inherent rights, government by consent underscores the equal participation of citizens in the political process, and the right to revolution implies that the principle of equality should be upheld in a just government. These principles have had a profound and enduring impact on American society, contributing to the ongoing struggle for civil rights and equality.
5. In the context of the Declaration of Independence, the principle of self-determination means that people have the right to determine their own political status and make decisions about their future without external interference. The American colonists sought to establish a government that reflected their values and interests, free from British rule.

