

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## The Fundamental Principles of the Declaration of Independence

### Open-Ended Response Answer Key

1. The concept of natural rights in the Declaration of Independence is highly significant. It asserts that all individuals are endowed with certain unalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These rights are considered inherent and cannot be taken away by any government or authority. This 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. The concept of natural rights is foundational to the principles of individual liberty and self-determination and continues to be a fundamental part of American political philosophy.
2. The principle of government by consent, as highlighted in the declaration, is essential in shaping the relationship between citizens and their government. It emphasizes that legitimate governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, meaning 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 participate in the political process. It underscores the idea that governments exist to serve the interests and will of the people, and it forms the basis for representative democracy and the protection of individual rights.
3. The declaration's emphasis on the right to revolution is a significant aspect of the document, as it articulates the circumstances under which the people have the right to take action against an oppressive government. When a government becomes destructive of the people's rights and no longer serves their interests, the declaration asserts that the people have the right to alter or abolish it and institute a new government. This principle played a crucial role in justifying the American colonies' resistance to British rule during the American Revolution. It provided a moral and philosophical foundation for the colonists' actions and their quest for independence. It also underscores the idea that governments exist to protect the rights and well-being of their citizens and that the people have the ultimate authority to ensure this protection.
4. Although the ideal of equality is not explicitly mentioned in the declaration, it is implicit in its principles. The concept of equality is reflected in the emphasis on natural rights, government by consent, and the right to revolution. Natural rights assert that all individuals possess the same inherent rights, regardless of their background or status. Government by consent underscores the equal participation of citizens in the political process, where every eligible individual's voice is equally important. The right to revolution implies that the principle of equality should be upheld in a just government, as it allows the people to resist and replace a government that violates their rights. These principles have had a profound and enduring impact on American society, contributing to the ongoing struggle for civil rights and equality for all citizens.

