

Name _____

Decoding "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" in the Declaration of Independence

Open-Ended Response Answer Key

1. The phrase "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence represents fundamental principles. "Liberty" in the context of the declaration refers to the freedom to make choices, pursue one's interests, and live without undue restrictions. It implies the absence of tyranny or oppression that would limit an individual's choices and actions. The idea of liberty is essential in the document as it underscores the importance of individuals being free to make decisions about their own lives, contributing to the document's overall message of self-determination.
2. "The pursuit of happiness" in the declaration encompasses the idea that individuals have the right to seek and pursue their own well-being, fulfillment, and happiness. It acknowledges that each person's interpretation of happiness may vary, and it encompasses the pursuit of personal goals, dreams, and aspirations that contribute to one's sense of well-being and satisfaction. This concept is considered significant as it emphasizes individual autonomy and self-determination, aligning with the principles of the declaration.
3. Enlightenment philosophy heavily influenced the inclusion of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence. Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasized the importance of individual rights, freedom from tyranny, and the pursuit of one's own happiness. These ideas informed the principles articulated in the declaration, reflecting the Enlightenment's focus on reason, liberty, and the inherent rights of individuals.
4. The inclusion of the phrase "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" in the declaration signifies the unique character of the United States as a nation founded on principles of individual rights and freedom. It distinguishes the nation as one where individuals have the right to pursue their own paths to happiness within the bounds of a just society. This inclusion reflects the nation's commitment to self-determination and the protection of individual liberties, setting it apart from other nations and shaping its identity as a beacon of freedom and opportunity.

