

Benchmark: CCSS.ELA Literacy.W.7.1 (standard) Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. CCSS.ELA Literacy.W.7.1a (benchmark) Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

DOK Level: 3

United States. Preamble and First Amendment to the United States Constitution. (1787, 1791).

Preamble

We, the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.

Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Monk, Linda R. *Words We Live By: Your Annotated Guide to the Constitution*. New York: Hyperion, 2003.

From "We the People ... "

The first three words of the Constitution are the most important. They clearly state that the people—not the king, not the legislature, not the courts—are the true rulers in American government. This principle is known as popular sovereignty. But who are "We the People"? This question troubled the nation for centuries. As Lucy Stone, one of America's first advocates for women's rights, asked in 1853, "'We the People'? Which 'We the People'? The women were not included." Neither were white males who did not own property, American Indians, or African Americans—slave or free. Justice Thurgood Marshall, the first African American on the Supreme Court, described the limitation:

For a sense of the evolving nature of the Constitution, we need look no further than the first three words of the document's preamble: 'We the People.' When the Founding Fathers used this phrase in 1787, they did not have in mind the majority of America's citizens . . . The men who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 could not . . . have imagined, nor would they have accepted, that the document they were drafting would one day be construed by a Supreme court to which had been appointed a woman and the descendant of an African slave.

Through the Amendment process, more and more Americans were eventually included in the Constitution's definition of "We the People." After the Civil War, the Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment gave African Americans citizenship, and the Fifteenth Amendment gave black men the vote. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment gave women the right to vote nationwide, and in 1971, the Twenty sixth

Amendment extended suffrage to eighteen year olds.

Linda Monk suggests that the founders of the United States defined "We, the People" as white males owning property, at the exclusion of all other groups of individuals. Justice Thurgood Marshall goes so far as to say the founders "could not . . . have imagined, nor would they have accepted" that the definition could be so expanded as to allow an African American and a woman to serve on the Supreme Court.

Explain whether or not you agree with the statement that the founders would not have imagined or accepted today's definition of "We, the People." Use details from either or both passages, as well as your own knowledge of citizenship, to justify your answer.

Response Area:

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