

Why is the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' so significant?



Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 1789 / Credit: Bridgeman Art Library / Universal Images Group / Copyright Bridgeman Art Library / For Education Use Only. This and millions of other educational images are available through Britannica Image Quest. For a free trial, please visit www.britannica.co.uk/trial

Results:

Remarkable:

Remembered:

Revealing:

Resonant:

Why is the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' so significant?

Task: Read through the information below. Decide which pieces of evidence support the significance criteria and write in the boxes in order to answer the enquiry question.

In August 1789, the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen' was published by the National Assembly. It said:

- All men are free and have equal rights.
- Governments only exist to protect these rights.
- Liberty means the freedom to do anything that does not harm others.
- There should be freedom of religion and freedom to express your opinions.
- No one can be imprisoned or arrested unless charged.
- Taxes should be paid by everyone according to their wealth.
- All citizens should be consulted before taxes are levied.

Over the next two years the National Assembly made reforms in five key areas: local councils, the Church, tax, the Law and the national government. This broke down the principals of the *Ancien Regime*, mostly notably perhaps, was the fact that the Church also had to pay taxes. This showed that Estates system and Absolutism had broken down.

They reveal that the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers in the 18th century had taken hold and awakened the idea that people did not want to be 'subjects': they wanted to be 'citizens'.

Even today the principles of the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' are important. Along with the Bill of Rights in the USA, they are regarded as the basis for human rights that international bodies, like the United Nations, uphold.

Teaching notes

This resource invites students to consider the significance of the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' using the five Rs. This methodology may need further explanation if it is not something you regularly use in your classroom.

Christine Counsell's five 'R's

Remarkable: the event or person was remarkable. They were remarked on at the time and by people since. They were considered to be important by their contemporaries and by following generations.

Remembered: the person or event has been remembered by groups who consider it an important part of the nation's past.

Results: the event or person resulted in change; there were important consequences for the future.

Resonant: people can link their experiences, beliefs or situations in the present to this person or event.

Revealing: it tells us something about the lives of ordinary people normally hidden from our view.

(Adapted from Christine Counsell: 'Looking through a Josephine-Butler shaped window: focusing pupils' thinking on historical significance' Teaching History 114)