

Name: _____

Date: _____

Declaration of Independence 1776

Primary Source Analysis



Background: In July of 1775, the Second Continental Congress was readying for war but still hoping for peace. On July 8, 1775, the Congress sent King George III the Olive Branch Petition, urging a return to the former harmony between Britain and the colonies. The king scoffed at the petition, and urged Parliament to order a naval blockade of the American coast.

In the months after the Olive Branch Petition, a thin document containing powerful words of an angry citizen began to circulate and change public opinion. The document was a 50-page pamphlet written by Thomas Paine called *Common Sense*. In the pamphlet, Paine declared that the time had come for colonists to proclaim an independent republic. The pamphlet sold nearly 500,000 copies and was widely praised, even by George Washington.

By the summer of 1776, events had worsened between Britain and the colonies. A few colonies were already declaring themselves independent. The Second Continental Congress appointed a committee to prepare a formal declaration explaining the reasons for the colonies' actions. The committee, which included Thomas Jefferson, drafted the Declaration of Independence. On July 2, 1776 the delegates voted unanimously to approve it. On July 4th, 1776, they adopted the Declaration of Independence. In the next page, you will read excerpts from the Declaration of Independence. The excerpts are broken down into 6 parts: 1. Preamble, 2. Beliefs, 3. Complaints, 4. Attempt to address grievances, 5. Declaring Independence, and 6. Signatures.

A. Given the context, what do you think is the meaning of the word scoffed?

B. Who wrote the pamphlet called *Common Sense*?

C. How many copies did the *Common Sense* sell?

D. **True or False:** Some states were individually declaring their independence from England?

E. On what day was the Declaration of Independence formally adopted?

F. How many different parts are included in the Declaration of Independence?

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The Declaration of Independence 1776

Excerpt 1 (Preamble):

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

"When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitled them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."

Excerpt 2 (Beliefs):

...it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

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1. What was the purpose of the Declaration of Independence?
2. Predict: What do you think will come next after the phrase – “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to separation”?

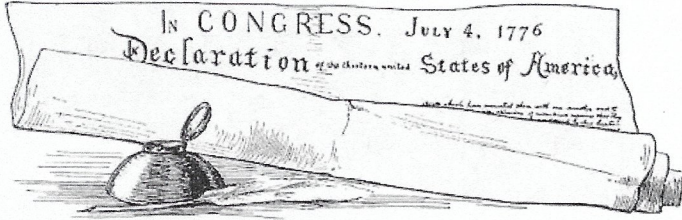
3. Draw a picture of the three natural or unalienable rights listed.

Life	Liberty	Pursuit of Happiness

4. According to the Declaration of Independence, from whom do governments get their power?
5. According to the Declaration of Independence, what should people do when the government abuses its power?

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Excerpt 3 (Complaints):



A. He [King George III] has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

B. He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

C. He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

D. For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent.

E. He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

F. He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

Date: _____

6. Here are six examples of grievances that Jefferson listed against King George III. In all, there are 28 of them. Please put each of the following grievances into your own words (work with a partner).

A.

He has refused approval of laws, which we need in order to protect ourselves and our society.

B.

He has not allowed our leaders to pass the laws we need, and if they do pass laws he stops them. And when he suspends the laws, he doesn't create new ones that would help us.

C.

He has pushed the army on us even though we are at peace with England.

D. He has taxed us without giving us a chance to speak about those taxes.

D.

He has given up his right to rule us because he says we are outside of his protection and he has declared war on us.

F. He has turned the Native Americans against us, and he has brought them close to us in order for them to wage war against us. The Native Americans are cruel and will kill us all.

Name: _____

Excerpt 4 (Attempt to address grievances):



“In every stage of these Oppressions, We have petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.”

Excerpt 5 (Declaring Independence):



We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved;

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.


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7. What phrase means “that the King has not listened to their request and has actually made things worse?”

8. Given the context, what do you think the word “acquiesce” means?

9. What is the tone of this excerpt? What sentence supports your answer?

10. This portion of the Declaration of Independence has often been referred to as a “break up.” Imagine that you are “breaking up” with King George III. Write him a postcard letting him know that the relationship is over.

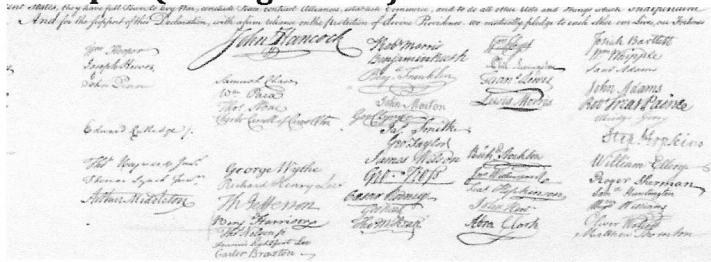
	
	<u>King George III</u> <u>Winsor Castle</u> <u>England</u>

11. How do you think King George III reacted to seeing this portion of the Declaration of Independence?

Name: _____

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Excerpt 6 (The Signatures):



There were 56 signatures on the Declaration.

Column 1

Georgia:

Button Gwinnett
Lyman Hall
George Walton

Column 2

North Carolina:

William Hooper
Joseph Hewes
John Penn

South Carolina:

Edward Rutledge
Thomas Heyward, Jr.
Thomas Lynch, Jr.
Arthur Middleton

Column 3

Massachusetts:

John Hancock

Maryland:

Samuel Chase
William Paca
Thomas Stone
Charles Carroll of Carrollton

Virginia:

George Wythe
Richard Henry Lee
Thomas Jefferson
Benjamin Harrison
Thomas Nelson, Jr.
Francis Lightfoot Lee
Carter Braxton

Column 4

Pennsylvania:

Robert Morris
Benjamin Rush
Benjamin Franklin
John Morton

George Clymer

James Smith

George Taylor

James Wilson

George Ross

Delaware:

Caesar Rodney
George Read
Thomas McKean

Column 5

New York:

William Floyd
Philip Livingston
Francis Lewis
Lewis Morris

New Jersey:

Richard Stockton
John Witherspoon
Francis Hopkinson
John Hart
Abraham Clark

Column 6

New Hampshire:

Josiah Bartlett
William Whipple
Massachusetts:
Samuel Adams
John Adams
Robert Treat Paine

Rhode Island:

Stephen Hopkins
William Ellery

Connecticut:

Roger Sherman
Samuel Huntington
William Williams
Oliver Wolcott

New Hampshire:

Matthew Thornton

12. Which state had the most delegates sign the Declaration of Independence?

13. The men who signed this declaration knew they were committing treason – a crime punishable by death. The largest signature on the Declaration of Independence was signed by John Hancock (President of the Continental Congress). After signing his name, John Hancock famously said, “There, I guess King George will be able to read that.” What can you infer from this act by John Hancock?

14. Which state had the least amount of delegates sign?

15. Can you identify these famous Americans that signed the Declaration of Independence and the state they were representing.

Picture	Name	State they represented
