

Documents: Declaration of Independence	Name: _____
Time: _____	Date: _____

Directions: Analyze the document and answer the questions.

Background: The Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in May 1775 a month after the “Shot Heard Round the World” at Lexington. Three months later, King George III declared the Colonies in a state of rebellion. As Congress debated and moved toward supporting independence, the Declaration Committee nominated Thomas Jefferson to write a document stating the reasons for separating from Great Britain. On July 2, 1776, by unanimous vote, the thirteen colonies voted in favor of Virginia’s call for independence. Two days later, Congress approved Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence.

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.

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. . . . But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute

Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. . . .

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 that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. 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.

Central Ideas. A central idea is the overall topic of the entire piece.

1. What is the central idea of Thomas Jefferson’s declaration?
 - E. Parliament is creating an absolute tyranny over the states.
 - H. All people are entitled to natural rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
 - O. Britain is guilty of a long list of abuses against the colonies.
 - Y. The colonies should be independent of Great Britain.

Words in Context. Define words based upon how they are used in the writing.

“The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States....”

2. What does the word “Tyranny” mean as it is used in the quote above?
- D. control
 - I. monarchy
 - R. cruel or oppressive government
 - W. democracy ruled by a king or queen

Facts vs. Opinions.

Fact: A conclusion that can be proven true and/or is absolutely accurate to all people involved.

Opinion: belief or preference about something that cannot be proven or accepted by all people.

The British government is a tyranny.

3. Identify the statement above as fact, opinion, or reasoned judgment.
- A. fact
 - N. opinion

Textual Evidence. When an author writes, they have an audience in mind that will read the material. Read the two quotes below:

“...a decent respect to the opinions of mankind [the world] requires that they [colonies] should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”

“...as Free and Independent States, they [colonies] have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.”

4. Who is Jefferson speaking to in these statements?
- E. the leaders of the thirteen colonies
 - H. the people of Great Britain
 - O. anti-British French Canadians
 - Y. potential allies such as France and Spain

“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.”

5. What group(s), in general, does this statement not apply to at this time?
- D. Protestants and Catholics
 - I. women and African American men
 - R. Europeans
 - W. merchants