



What is the Declaration of Independence?

July 4, 1776 was a remarkable day in Philadelphia. The Second Continental Congress had already voted for independence from England. The members of Congress carefully reviewed the Declaration of Independence, authored by Thomas Jefferson. They decided to approve this document as the exact statement they wanted to make to King George III to declare their freedom. Now, we celebrate every July 4th as our Independence Day. It is important to remember that July 4th is the day we declared our independence from England, but we didn't actually earn our independence until a few years later.

The Declaration of Independence was read aloud in Philadelphia's town square. After this document was read, patriots cheered with excitement. In some cities and towns, people even celebrated with fireworks.

The Declaration of Independence was actually signed by most of the Congressional delegates in August. The largest, most visible signature is that of John Hancock.

The men who signed the Declaration of Independence did not take their choice lightly. They knew that signing the Declaration of Independence was like signing their death warrants. By signing this document, they were committing treason against their powerful ruling country, England. The men who signed the Declaration of Independence were some of the most wealthy, powerful men in the colonies. They had a lot to lose! They took a great risk by signing their names to this document.



What is the Declaration of Independence?

Name: _____

1. What was Thomas Jefferson's purpose in writing the Declaration of Independence?

2. What event do we celebrate on July 4th every year?

3. What is unique about John Hancock's signature on the Declaration of Independence?

4. Why do you think this document was called the "Declaration of Independence?"

5. Describe the difficult decision the men who signed the Declaration of Independence faced.

The Declaration of Independence

...it's just a break-up letter!

Read this text of the Declaration of Independence. Discuss the meaning of this text with a partner.

“ ...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;

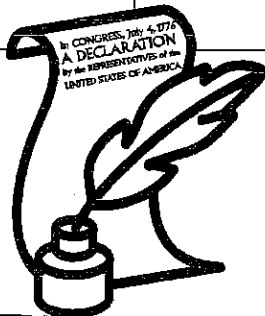
<u>solemnly:</u> formally and with great care	<u>Independent:</u> free and self-governing	<u>Absolved:</u> to release
<u>Allegiance:</u> loyalty	<u>connection:</u> link or bond	<u>dissolved:</u> removed or disappeared

The Declaration of Independence ...and all of those fancy words!

Instructions: Read this selection from the Declaration of Independence with a partner. Be sure to refer to the definitions at the bottom of this sheet when you see a bold, underlined word. Then, complete the matching activity on the next page.

“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**.”

<u>self-evident:</u> clear to everyone	<u>endowed by their Creator:</u> given by God
<u>unalienable rights:</u> rights that no one can take away	<u>pursuit of Happiness:</u> freedom to find happiness



The Declaration of Independence ...and all of those fancy words!

Name: _____

Instructions: Complete the matching activity. Write the letter of each answer in the space next to the number.

_____ 1. "endowed by their
Creator"

A. everyone should be
treated the same

_____ 2. "self-evident"

B. rights that no one can
take away from you

_____ 3. "liberty"

C. given by God

_____ 4. "all men are
created equal"

D. having the right to
freedom

_____ 5. "pursuit of
Happiness"

E. free to find happiness

_____ 6. "certain unalienable
rights"

F. clear to everyone

Grievance Matching

Can you match these grievances from the Declaration of Independence with their modern language definitions?

Name: _____

Instructions: Write the letter of the answer next to each number. "He" refers to King George III.

_____ 1. "He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good."

_____ 2. "He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people."

_____ 3. "He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries."

_____ 4. "He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the consent of our legislatures."

_____ 5. "For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:"

_____ 6. "For protecting them, by a Mock trial from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:"

_____ 7. "For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:"

_____ 8. "For depriving us in many cases, of the benefit of Trial by Jury:"

_____ 9. "For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:"

A. He has forced us to house and feed soldiers against our will.

B. He has made us pay taxes without letting us vote or have a representative vote for the taxes.

C. Our Judges are not being fair because they know King George III will not allow them to keep their jobs or get paid unless they do what he wants.

D. He has not allowed us to have a Jury of our peers decide whether we are guilty or not.

E. He has not punished British soldiers who murder colonists.

F. He has not allowed us to make laws that benefit the Colonies.

G. He has not allowed our lawmakers to meet because they disagree with him.

H. He has placed armies in the Colonies against our will. There was no reason for this because we are at peace.

I. He has taken us across the ocean to be put on trial for crimes we didn't commit.

Grievances in the Declaration of Independence

What does the word “grievance” mean?

Grievance is a fancy way to say “a complaint.” Have you ever complained to your teacher? You were voicing a grievance. The colonists had many grievances about how they were being treated by England, especially by King George III. They listed these grievances in the Declaration of Independence as reasons why they had decided to declare their independence from England.

What were the top five grievances listed in the Declaration of Independence?

Thomas Jefferson and the colonists included many grievances against King George III in the Declaration of Independence. These are the top five grievances:

1. He didn't allow the colonists to have a voice in making laws.
2. He forced the colonists to house and feed British soldiers.
3. He required colonists to join the British Navy against their will.
4. He refused to punish British soldiers who injured or even killed colonists.
5. He fired Colonial leaders who disagreed with him.



Grievances in the Declaration of Independence

Journal Entry

Name: _____

Describe a time when you voiced a grievance to your parents or to a teacher. Were you taken seriously? Did your situation get any better?

Choose a grievance from the top five list on the previous page. Describe why you think the colonists were so angry concerning that grievance. How would you feel if that were happening in our country today?
