

The Declaration of Independence

Public Document by Thomas Jefferson

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:
How do we gain our freedom?

Engage Your Brain

Choose one or more of these activities to start connecting with the public document you're about to read.



★ Influence Is No Government

What makes a government oppressive or representative? How should a government go about representing the will of the people? Why would a government choose not to do so? Free write for five minutes to answer.

Student Council

Think about student government at your school. With a partner, discuss how involved the student council is in shaping policies for students. How do their actions and decisions directly affect student life?

Declaration v. Constitution v. Bill of Rights

The three most important public documents in the United States are the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. How well do you know what's in them? Look at the following statements and identify which of the three documents they come from. Next to each statement, write *DI* for Declaration of Independence, *C* for Constitution, or *BR* for Bill of Rights.

- "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." *BR*
- "All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives." *C*
- "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." *BR*
- "[A]s 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." *DI*
- "[T]o secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." *DI*
- "Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying War against them, or in adhering to their Enemies, giving them Aid and Comfort." *C*

Determine Central Idea

The Declaration of Independence is a public document focused on a **central idea**, or an overall message in the text. Like any other well-written text, a public document may contain more than one idea. To recognize a central idea, ask yourself:

- What is the most important thing the author is saying?
- What details support the author's ideas?
- What words and phrases are repeated or emphasized?

For example, Jefferson repeats the words *tyranny* and *tyrant* to justify the colonies' move to independence. As you read the Declaration of Independence, notice the ways Jefferson conveys central ideas.

Focus on Genre

↳ Public Document

- establishes a legal and/or philosophical framework for structuring society and civic life
- has great historical or social significance
- includes a clear purpose and a strong theme
- uses repetition of words and phrases to reinforce meaning and create rhythm
- uses parallelism, or similar grammatical structures, to express ideas that are related or equal in importance

Analyze Argument

The power of the Declaration of Independence comes not just from *what* it says but *how* Jefferson says it. Jefferson combines rhetoric and structure to create a compelling argument. The structural features of Jefferson's argument include

- a clear, arguable **central idea**
- **reasons** and **evidence** that support the central idea
- logical and emotional **appeals** to the audience
- a convincing **conclusion** that sums up the important ideas
- a **call to action** that encourages the audience to do something

As you read, use the structure of the text to follow Jefferson's reasoning. Use the chart to analyze the structural elements of Jefferson's argument.

Central Ideas	Logical and Emotional Appeals	Conclusion	Call to Action

Annotation in Action

Here are one student's comments on the features of an argument. As you read, mark words or phrases that move the argument forward.

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.

Jefferson will offer reasons for the action he proposes.

Expand Your Vocabulary

Put a check mark next to the vocabulary words that you feel comfortable using when speaking or writing.

- | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| establish | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| affect | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| invest | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| abdicate | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Turn to a partner and discuss what you know about the Declaration of Independence. As you read, use the definitions in the side column to learn the vocabulary words you don't already know.



Background

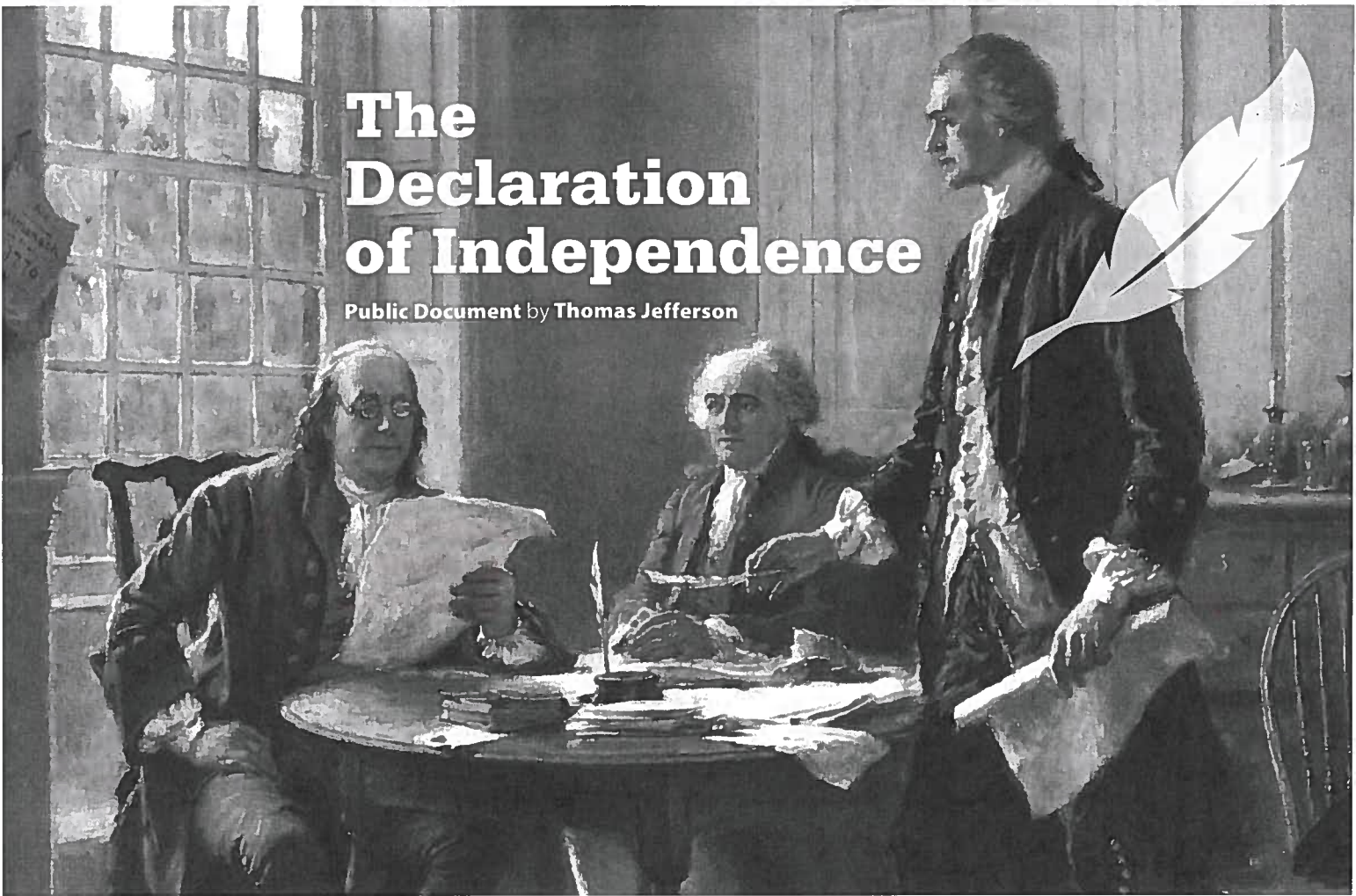
Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) was one of the most accomplished of our nation's founders. He was minister to France after the American Revolution and the third president of the United States. However, more important than his titles was his vision of liberty and self-government, eloquently expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Drafted by Jefferson, the Declaration was debated by the Second Continental Congress and adopted on July 4, 1776. The Declaration begins with an assertion of the Enlightenment ideas of "self-evident" truths of liberty and human rights.

Historical Context

this document was a declaration of war - were they ready for it give full justification for this outcome? Did it give full justification for this action?

The Declaration of Independence

Public Document by Thomas Jefferson



Pay attention to the evidence Jefferson uses to support the idea of American independence. → lists grievances against King George III & British Parliament.

NOTICE & NOTE

As you read, use the side margins to make notes about the text.

1 **W**hen, 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. → if we declare Independence & war then we need to justify it & explain ourselves

DETERMINE CENTRAL IDEA

Annotate: Mark words in paragraph 2 that state Jefferson's central idea.

Cite Evidence: What details in paragraph 2 present justification for his central idea? Explain.

2 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 a 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. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not

→ gov. needs to look out for everyone to keep society functioning & progressive
→ Central/Controlling Idea

establish
(ĭ-stăb'lish) v. to formally set up; institute.

foundational principles for a self-governing society that looks out for the people's interest, through elected officials people's needs & rights are protected

Image Credits: ©John Parrot/Stocktrek Images/Getty Images



Close Read Screencast

Listen to a modeled close read of this text.

ANALYZE ARGUMENT

Annotate: Circle the repeated phrase in paragraphs 3–10. Underline the phrases in paragraphs 6 and 7 that give reasons for the king's behavior.

Draw Conclusions: How does the structure of Jefferson's complaints strengthen his argument?

be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute **despotism**,¹ 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 that constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of **the present King of Great Britain**² is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having, in direct object, the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

- 3 He has **refused his assent to laws**³ the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.
- 4 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.
- 5 He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless these people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature—a right inestimable to them, and formidable to tyrants only.
- 6 He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measure.
- 7 He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing, with manly firmness, his invasions on the rights of the people.
- 8 He has refused, for a long time after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the State remaining, in the meantime, exposed to all dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.
- 9 He has endeavored **to prevent the population**⁴ of these States; for that purpose obstructing the laws for the naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.
- 10 He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.
- 11 He has made judges dependent on his will alone for **the tenure of their offices**,⁵ and the amount and payment of their salaries.

¹ **despotism** (dēs' pə-tīz-əm): government by a ruler with unlimited power.

² **the present King of Great Britain:** George III, who reigned from 1760 to 1820.

³ **refused his assent to laws:** Laws passed in the colonial legislative assemblies needed the king's approval; sometimes it took years for laws to be approved or rejected.

⁴ **to prevent the population:** to keep the population from growing.

⁵ **the tenure of their offices:** their job security.

- 12 He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms
of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.⁶
- 13 He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies,
without the consent of our legislatures.
- 14 He has affected to render the military independent of, and
superior to, the civil power.
- 15 He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction
foreign to our constitutions,⁷ and unacknowledged by our laws;
giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:
- 16 For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;
- 17 For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any
murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these States;
- 18 For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;
- 19 For imposing taxes on us without our consent;
- 20 For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury;
- 21 For transporting us beyond the seas, to be tried for pretended
offenses;
- 22 For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring
province,⁸ establishing there an arbitrary government, and enlarging
its boundaries, so as to render it at once an example and fit
instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies;
- 23 For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws,
and altering, fundamentally, the forms of our governments;
- 24 For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves
invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.
- 25 He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his
protection, and waging war against us.
- 26 He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns,⁹
and destroyed the lives of our people.
- 27 He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries
to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already
begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in
the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized
nation.
- 28 He has constrained our fellow citizens, taken captive on the high
seas, to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners
of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.
- 29 He has excited domestic insurrection amongst us,¹⁰ 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.

Don't forget to
Notice & Note as you
read the text.



affect

(ə-fĕkt') v. to cause or influence.

ANALYZE ARGUMENT

Annotate: The repetition of grammatical constructions to express ideas that are related is called **parallelism**. Mark examples of parallelism that Jefferson uses in paragraphs 16–24.

Analyze: How does the use of parallelism strengthen Jefferson's argument?

invest

(ĭn-vĕst') v. to grant or endow.

abdicate

(ăb'dĭ-kāt) v. to relinquish or cede responsibility for.

⁶ **eat out their substance:** use up their resources.

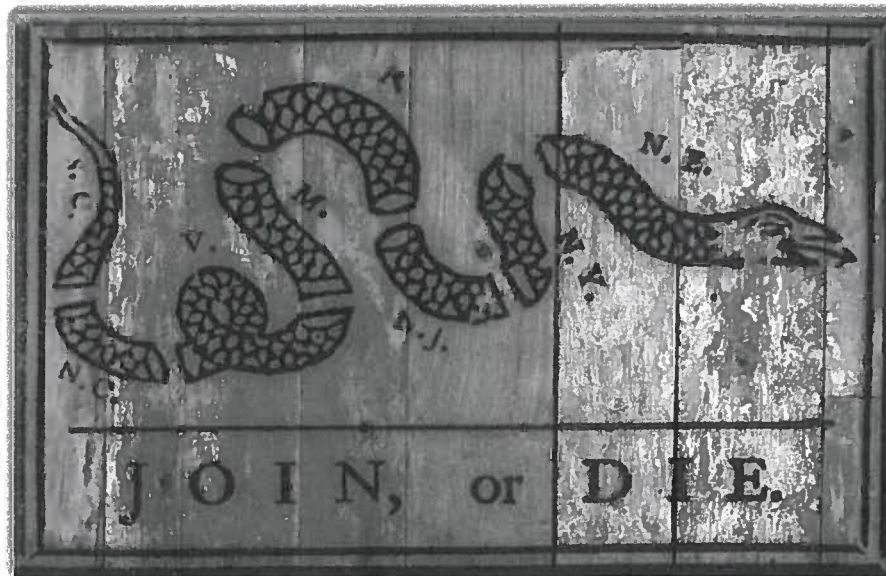
⁷ **subject us . . . our constitutions:** Parliament had passed the Declaratory Act in 1766, stating that the king and Parliament could make laws for the colonies.

⁸ **a neighboring province:** the province of Quebec, which at the time extended south to the Ohio River and west to the Mississippi.

⁹ **plundered . . . our towns:** American seaports such as Norfolk, Virginia, had already been shelled.

¹⁰ **excited . . . amongst us:** Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, had encouraged slaves to rise up and rebel against their masters.





NOTICE & NOTE
EXTREME OR
ABSOLUTE LANGUAGE

When you notice language that leaves no doubt about a situation or an event, or allows no compromise, you've found an **Extreme or Absolute Language** signpost.

Notice & Note: Mark examples of extreme or absolute language in paragraph 30.

Interpret: How does the author use this language to support the idea of declaring independence?

30 In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress,¹¹ 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.

31 Nor have we been wanting in our attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them, from time to time, of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity; and we have conjured them, by the ties of our common kindred, to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence.

32 They, too, have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity.¹² 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.

33 We, Therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude¹³ of our intentions, do, in the name and by the 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,

¹¹ redress: the correction of a wrong; compensation.

¹² deaf to . . . consanguinity: The British have ignored pleas based on their common ancestry with the colonists.

¹³ rectitude: morally correct behavior or thinking.

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.



ESSENTIAL QUESTION:
How do we gain our freedom?

Review your notes and add your thoughts to your **Response Log**.

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION

According to Jefferson, what are the characteristics of a good government? Discuss your ideas with a partner.

Assessment Practice

Answer these questions before moving on to the **Analyze the Text** section on the following page.

1. On what did Jefferson base his belief that all men are created equal?
 - (A) their rights as British citizens
 - (B) the will of the British king
 - (C) the laws of nature and God
 - (D) traditions of the colonies
2. What is Jefferson's main argument against remaining connected to Britain?
 - (A) The colonies are ready to be on their own.
 - (B) The British king has been an unjust tyrant.
 - (C) The colonists no longer wish to obey British law.
 - (D) Other countries expect this of the colonists.
3. What is the conclusion of Jefferson's argument?
 - (A) The colonists must separate from Britain.
 - (B) The colonists should give Britain another chance.
 - (C) Britain had always been good to the colonists.
 - (D) Britain should overthrow its king.

