

# The Declaration of Independence

## EXPLORING THE DOCUMENT

Thomas  
Jefferson

wrote the first draft of the Declaration in a little more than two weeks. **How is the Declaration's idea about why governments are formed still important to our country today?**

## Vocabulary

**impel** force

**endowed** provided

**usurpations** wrongful seizures of power

**evinces** clearly displays

**despotism** unlimited power

**tyranny** oppressive power exerted by a government or ruler

**candid** fair

## EXPLORING THE DOCUMENT

Here the  
Declaration

lists the charges that the colonists had against King George III. **How does the language in the list appeal to people's emotions?**

*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. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not 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**, 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. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a **candid** world.

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

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.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would **relinquish** the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right **inestimable** to them and **formidable** to tyrants only.

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 measures.

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

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 mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and **convulsions** within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws of **Naturalization of Foreigners**; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new **Appropriations of Lands**.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.

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

He has erected **a multitude of** New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.

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

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended legislation:

For **quartering** large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from Punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

## Vocabulary

**relinquish** release, yield

**inestimable** priceless

**formidable** causing dread

**annihilation** destruction

**convulsions** violent disturbances

**naturalization of foreigners** the process by which foreign-born persons become citizens

**appropriations of lands** setting aside land for settlement

**tenure** term

**a multitude of** many

**quartering** lodging, housing



Mum Bett, a Massachusetts slave, believed that the words "all men are created equal" should apply to her and other enslaved Africans. She successfully sued for her freedom in 1781.



## Vocabulary

**arbitrary** not based on law

**render** make

**abdicated** given up

**foreign mercenaries**  
soldiers hired to fight for a  
country not their own

**perfidy** violation of trust

**insurrections** rebellions

**petitioned for redress**  
asked formally for a  
correction of wrongs

**unwarrantable jurisdiction**  
unjustified authority

**magnanimity** generous  
spirit

**conjured** urgently called  
upon

**consanguinity** common  
ancestry

**acquiesce** consent to

### EXPLORING THE DOCUMENT

Here the Declaration calls the king a tyrant. **What do you think *tyrant* means in this passage?**

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighboring Province, establishing therein 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:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislature, and declaring themselves invested with Power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

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

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

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 & **perfidy** scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

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.

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.

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.

Nor have We been wanting in attention 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. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of **consanguinity**. 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.

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.

|                                  |                       |                    |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| John Hancock                     | Benjamin Harrison     | Lewis Morris       |
| Button Gwinnett                  | Thomas Nelson, Jr.    | Richard Stockton   |
| Lyman Hall                       | Francis Lightfoot Lee | John Witherspoon   |
| George Walton                    | Carter Braxton        | Francis Hopkinson  |
| William Hooper                   | Robert Morris         | John Hart          |
| Joseph Hewes                     | Benjamin Rush         | Abraham Clark      |
| John Penn                        | Benjamin Franklin     | Josiah Bartlett    |
| Edward Rutledge                  | John Morton           | William Whipple    |
| Thomas Heyward, Jr.              | George Clymer         | Samuel Adams       |
| Thomas Lynch, Jr.                | James Smith           | John Adams         |
| Arthur Middleton                 | George Taylor         | Robert Treat Paine |
| Samuel Chase                     | James Wilson          | Elbridge Gerry     |
| William Paca                     | George Ross           | Stephen Hopkins    |
| Thomas Stone                     | Caesar Rodney         | William Ellery     |
| Charles Carroll<br>of Carrollton | George Read           | Roger Sherman      |
| George Wythe                     | Thomas McKean         | Samuel Huntington  |
| Richard Henry Lee                | William Floyd         | William Williams   |
| Thomas Jefferson                 | Philip Livingston     | Oliver Wolcott     |
|                                  | Francis Lewis         | Matthew Thornton   |

## Vocabulary

**rectitude** rightness

### EXPLORING THE DOCUMENT

Here is where the document declares the independence of the colonies. **Whose authority does the Congress use to declare independence?**

### EXPLORING THE DOCUMENT

The Congress adopted the final draft of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. A formal copy, written on parchment paper, was signed on August 2, 1776. **From whom did the Declaration's signers receive their authority to declare independence?**

### EXPLORING THE DOCUMENT

The following is part of a passage that the Congress removed from Jefferson's original draft: "He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither." **Why do you think the Congress deleted this passage?**