

Declaration of Independence

Source Information: Excerpt from the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, written in large part by Thomas Jefferson, but including John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. It was signed by Delegates from all 13 states – as of this document – the new United States of America. The portion below is taken from the introduction and preamble.

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 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. Those 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 to 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 be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, 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.

VOCABULARY

station: place

impel: force

self-evident: obvious

endowed: given or granted

unalienable: cannot be taken away

instituted: established

deriving: getting

consent: official approval

prudence: caution or discretion

transient: not lasting

abolishing: getting rid off

usurpations: illegal seizure

despotism: absolute control, tyranny

1. Based on the words of the preamble and your own prior knowledge of American history, **why did the colonists declare independence from Great Britain?** (list as many different reasons you can think of)

Declaration of Independence – List of Grievances

Source Information: Following the introduction and preamble a series of 27 “grievances” or complaints were issued by the colonists to further explain their motives and reasoning in declaring independence.

Directions: Summarize each grievance into your own words and identify if the grievance represents one of the Economic, Political, or Social themes discussed in class.

Grievance	Summary	Thematic Category
(1 & 2) He has refused to pass laws, and forbidden his governors to pass important and necessary laws.		
(5 & 6) He has broken up certain legislatures that opposed him, and refused to let others be elected.		
(8 & 9) He has refused to establish courts of justice, and had made judges dependent on him for their jobs and salaries.		
(10) He has sent swarms of British officers to harass our people and eat our food.		
(11 & 12) He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without consent of our legislatures.		

Grievance	Summary In Your Own Words	Thematic Category
(16) For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;		
(17) For imposing taxes on us without our consent;		
(18) For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury;		
(23 & 24) He is waging war against us; He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coast, burned our towns and destroyed the lives of our people.		
(27) He has started fights among us and has also forced us to live near merciless Indian savages.		

2. Do you think these complaints would give people reason to go war and possibly die? Why or why not?