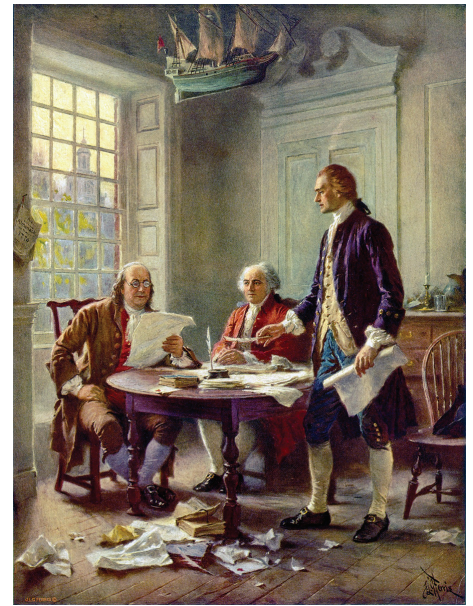


PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS: DECLARATION *of* INDEPENDENCE

In 1776, Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence to explain the reasons the Thirteen Colonies were separating from Great Britain. After 1763, the American colonists had grown increasingly frustrated with British rule. They felt Great Britain had taken away access to western lands, put unfair limits on their trade, and imposed harsh taxes.

Below is a selection from the Declaration of Independence. Read the text and answer the questions that follow.



Thomas Jefferson presents the Declaration of Independence.

Writing the Declaration of Independence, 1776,
by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris, artist

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.

self-evident: obvious and not needing to be explained
endowed: given
unalienable: cannot be taken or given away

1. Jefferson begins by saying, “We hold these truths to be self-evident.” What does he mean by this?

Jefferson means that his point should be clear and obvious.

2. Jefferson then states that “all men are created equal” and have “certain unalienable rights.” This was a new idea at the time. How does he say people get their rights?

Jefferson says that these rights come from God.

3. Jefferson lists “certain unalienable rights.” What three does he list?

The three rights are “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

4. **Summary:** What is Jefferson’s argument in this section?

Jefferson argues that everyone is equal and has the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

THINK ABOUT IT!

No one really knows what Jefferson meant by “pursuit of Happiness.” What do *you* think it means?

PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS:

DECLARATION *of* INDEPENDENCE

Keep going! Read the selections below and answer the questions that follow.

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.

instituted: started
deriving: getting
consent: agreement
alter: change
abolish: end

5. Jefferson states that governments are formed "to secure these rights." He is referring to the unalienable rights from the selection on page 1. Based on that, what does Jefferson see as the purpose of government?

The purpose of government is to protect people's rights.

6. According to the Declaration, what should people do if the government becomes "destructive"?

People should change or end their government if it becomes destructive.

7. **Summary:** What is Jefferson's argument in this section?

Jefferson argues that governments are made by people to protect their rights. If a government does not protect peoples' rights, then the people should change their government.

The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries . . . all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute **Tyranny** over these States. . . . We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, . . . 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.

tyranny: cruel and oppressive government

8. Who does Jefferson blame for the "history of repeated injuries"?

Jefferson blames the present king of Great Britain.

9. What does Jefferson "solemnly publish and declare" in his conclusion?

Jefferson solemnly publishes and declares that the colonies should be free and independent states.

10. **Summary:** What is Jefferson's argument in this section?

Jefferson argues that because Great Britain has violated their rights, the colonies in America are declaring independence.