A Nation Declares Independence

Objectives
- Find out how Thomas Paine stirred support for independence.
- Understand the meaning and structure of the Declaration of Independence.
- Learn how Congress finally agreed to separate from England.

Why It Matters
After King George rejected the Olive Branch Petition, thousands of British troops were sent to the colonies. As the fighting continued, American patriots called for independence.

Section Focus Question: Why did many colonists favor declaring independence?

A Call for Independence
When the year 1776 began, few colonists could have predicted what lay ahead. Most colonists still hoped for a peaceful end to the quarrel with Britain.

Colonists Divided
Both Patriots and Loyalists were in a minority at the start of 1776. Many colonists were in the middle, with no strong feelings about the dispute with Britain. Even within the Continental Congress, support for independence was limited to about one third of the delegates. Patriots such as John Adams found it hard to win others to the cause of independence. Adams complained that Loyalists used the prospect of independence as a way to frighten people into giving up the struggle.

Common Sense
In January 1776, a 50-page pamphlet titled Common Sense was published in Philadelphia. The pamphlet stimulated broad support for independence.

The author, Thomas Paine, called King George III a "royal brute." Paine ridiculed the very idea of rule by kings. Americans, he said, would be far better off if they governed themselves. (See Reading Primary Sources on the next page.)

Let Us Separate
"I could not join to day in the [prayers] of our worthy parson, for a reconciliation between our no longer parent state, but tyrant state, and these colonies. —Let us separate, they are unworthy to be our brethren. Let us renounce them."

—Abigail Adams, letter to husband John Adams at the Continental Congress, 1775
Paine’s strong logic and powerful words inspired people in all the colonies. Some 500,000 copies of the pamphlet were sold between January and July of 1776. George Washington wrote, “Common Sense is working a powerful change in the minds of men.”

**Virginia’s Resolution** Paine’s pamphlet increased support for independence within the Continental Congress. In May 1776, Virginia authorized its delegates to support independence. Soon after, Richard Henry Lee introduced a resolution, or formal statement of opinion, to Congress. The Virginia resolution proclaimed that “these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States.” Before voting on Lee’s resolution, Congress appointed a committee to draw up a statement stating the reasons for separation from Britain. Thomas Jefferson, a 33-year-old delegate from Virginia, was given the task of composing the declaration. Highly educated but shy, Jefferson spoke little in Congress. However, he was known for his graceful writing style.

In the heat of the Philadelphia summer, Jefferson struggled to find the words that would convince Americans and the world of the rightness of independence. The result was masterful. John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, who were also on the committee, suggested only minor changes.

**Checkpoint** What proposal did Richard Henry Lee make to Congress?

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**Common Sense**

“I challenge the warmest advocate for reconciliation, to show a single advantage that this continent can reap, by being connected with Great Britain. I repeat the challenge, not a single advantage is derived. Our corn will fetch its price in any market in Europe, and our imported goods must be paid for, buy them where we will. . . . Whenever a war breaks out between England and any foreign power, the trade of America goes to ruin, because of her connection with Britain. . . . Every thing that is right or natural pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, ’TIS TIME TO PART.”

—Thomas Paine, Common Sense

In **Common Sense**, Thomas Paine gives political, military, and moral arguments for breaking away from Britain. In the excerpt above, Paine discusses some economic reasons.

(a) **Identify Costs** Why does Paine think that association with Britain hurts American trade?
(b) **Make Inferences** What do you think Paine means by “the blood of the slain”?

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**Vocabulary Builder**

**High-Use Word**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Definition and Sample Sentence</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>logic, p. 171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>violate, p. 172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Teach**

**A Call for Independence**

**p. 170**

**Instruction**

- **Vocabulary Builder** Before teaching this section, preteach the High-Use Words logic and violate, using the strategy on TE p. T21.
- **Key Terms** Following the instruction on p. 7, have students create a See It–Remember It chart for the Key Terms in this chapter.
- **Ask:** Who was Thomas Paine? (He was a colonist who wrote a 50-page pamphlet outlining the need for colonial self-rule.)
- **Have students complete the worksheet Common Sense.**

**Independent Practice**

Have students begin to fill in the Study Guide for this section.

**Monitor Progress**

As students fill in the Notetaking Study Guide, circulate to make sure students understand the importance of Paine’s pamphlet to the revolutionary movement. Provide assistance as needed.

**Answers**

**Checkpoint** Richard Henry Lee proposed that they seek independence.

**Reading Primary Sources**

(a) It keeps colonists from earring market prices on their exports. Also, colonial trade is cut off when English trade is cut off due to its conflicts with other nations. (b) Possible answer: Just as blood leaves the body of someone slain, the colonists must leave England.
The Declaration of Independence
Impact of the Declaration
pp. 172–173

Instruction

- Have students read The Declaration of Independence and Impact of the Declaration. Remind students to look for details that answer the Section Focus Question.
- To help students better understand the concept of independence, which is important to the understanding of this chapter, use the Concept Lesson about Independence. Provide students with copies of the Concept Organizer.

Independent Practice

Have students complete the Study Guide for this section.

Monitor Progress

- As students complete the Notetaking Study Guide, circulate to make sure students understand the structure and significance of the Declaration of Independence. Provide assistance as needed.
- Tell students to fill in the last column of the Reading Readiness Guide. Probe for what they learned that confirms or invalidates each statement.

Answers

- Reading Skill Respect means “a view” or “attitude.”
- Checkpoint Possible answer: It says that everyone has certain inalienable rights.

The Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence is a brilliant piece of writing. Building on the ideas of the Enlightenment, it uses step-by-step logic to explain why the colonists wanted to break away from British rule. (See the Declaration of Independence following this section.) The Declaration begins with a preamble, or introduction. It says that “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind” requires that Americans explain why they are breaking away from Britain.

Natural Rights

The Declaration is divided into three main sections. The first section states some general ideas about society and government. “We hold these truths to be self-evident,” or obvious to all. First among these truths is that “all men are created equal.” Jefferson goes on to state that everyone is “endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.” This statement is based on John Locke’s ideas about natural rights. (See Chapter 4.)

Like Locke, Jefferson goes on to state that governments are created in order to protect people’s rights. And, like Locke, he concludes that, if a government violates those rights, the people have a right to abolish their government and create another.

List of Grievances

Jefferson’s next task was to prove that the British government had, in fact, violated the rights of the colonists. So the next section details a long list of specific grievances, or formal complaints, against King George III of England.

Many grievances accuse the king of ignoring rights that English citizens had enjoyed since the time of the Magna Carta. For example, the Magna Carta had established trial by jury as a basic right. The Declaration thus condemns the king “for depriving us, in many cases, of trial by jury.” The Declaration also charges the king with “imposing taxes on us without our consent”—another violation of traditional English rights.

Time after time, says the Declaration, colonists have appealed to the king. But King George has ignored the petitions they sent. He must, therefore, be considered “unfit to be the ruler of a free people.”

Dissolving the Bonds

After stating the basic principle that the people have a right to abolish an unjust government and showing that the king has violated the rights of the colonists, the Declaration reaches a logical conclusion. It asserts that the colonies are “free and independent states . . . and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be totally dissolved.” The document ends with a solemn pledge: “With a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” The serious tone shows that, to the Patriots, declaring independence was a serious and deeply felt step.

Checkpoint What does the Declaration of Independence say about people’s rights?
Impact of the Declaration

When Congress met to debate Lee’s resolution, it still was not certain that they would declare independence. But on July 4, 1776, Congress approved the Declaration of Independence. Since then, Americans have celebrated July 4th as Independence Day.

The actual signing of the Declaration took place on August 2. According to tradition, as he stepped up to sign the document, Benjamin Franklin commented, “We must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately.” Indeed, for the delegates who signed, the personal risk was great. If captured by the British, they could be hanged.

The Declaration of Independence changed the nature of the Revolution. No longer were the Patriots fighting for fairer treatment from Britain. Now, they were fighting to create a new nation. There was no turning back.

Since then, the Declaration of Independence has become one of the world’s enduring documents. The statement that “all men are created equal” still inspires Americans and people in other nations. In 1776, these words applied primarily to white, male property owners. Over the years, Americans worked to expand the notion of equality and natural rights.

Checkpoint

How did the Declaration change the nature of the American Revolution?

Looking Back and Ahead

Declaring independence from Britain was only a first step. For the Declaration to have real meaning, the Americans would have to win their liberties on the battlefield. In the next section, you will read about the progress of the war for independence.

Section 1 | Check Your Progress

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

1. (a) Recall: What was the main idea of Thomas Paine’s Common Sense?
   (b) Draw Conclusions: Why do you think Common Sense had such an impact on colonists?

2. (a) Identify: What are the major parts of the Declaration of Independence?
   (b) Apply Information: Why is the list of grievances against the king an important part of the Declaration?

Reading Skill

3. Analyze Word Roots: Use the word root spir, meaning “breathe,” to determine the meaning of the word inspire in this sentence: The statement that “all men are created equal” still inspires Americans and people in other nations.

Key Terms: Complete each sentence so that the second part further explains the first part and clearly shows your understanding of the key term.

4. The Declaration of Independence began with a preamble, or _____.
5. Congress took a step toward independence when Lee introduced Virginia’s resolution, or _____.
6. The Declaration includes a list of grievances, or _____.

Writing

7. List two challenges that you think Thomas Jefferson faced in writing the Declaration of Independence. Do you think he met these challenges? Explain.

Progress Monitoring Online

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Assess and Reteach

Assess Progress

Have students complete Check Your Progress. Administer the Section Quiz.

Progress Monitoring Transparencies, Chapter 6, Section 1

Reteach

If students need more instruction, have them read this section in the Interactive Reading and Notetaking Study Guide and complete the accompanying question.

Interactive Reading and Notetaking Study Guide, Chapter 6, Section 1 (Adapted Version also available.)

Extend

Have students write an editorial from the point of view of American colonists who have recently read Common Sense. Have them explain what they believe their rights are and whether they think they should seek independence from Britain. Have volunteers share their work with the class.

Progress Monitoring Online

Students may check their comprehension of this section by completing the Progress Monitoring Online graphic organizer and self-quiz.

Section 1 | A Nation Declares Independence

1. (a) It said that Americans would be better off if they ruled themselves.
   (b) Students may respond that it was well written and inspirational. Many people without strong feelings were swayed by its arguments. It summed up what many Americans probably felt.

2. (a) The major parts of the Declaration are the preamble, the section about grievances against King George, and the conclusion.
   (b) It showed that colonists were deprived of traditional English rights.

3. Possible answer: “All men are created equal” still breathes life and hope in Americans and people in other nations.

4. an introduction
5. formal statement of opinion
6. formal complaints

7. Students should list two challenges that Jefferson faced and explain if he met the challenges. Possible challenges: inspiring tone to convince colonists of need to separate; sound bases for his arguments

Answer

Checkpoint: It changed the purpose from a fight for fairness to a fight to create a new nation.