

Question Sheet for the Declaration Activity

As directed by your teacher, use the related resources from John Locke, as well as the Declaration of Independence, to answer the following questions.

1. Jefferson chose to begin the Declaration with the words, “The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.” Do you feel this was necessary? Why or why not? Could the 13 colonies have declared independence if they were not unanimous? Why or why not?
2. How does Jefferson explain the reason for a formal declaration of independence? Why do you think it was necessary for Jefferson to state the “causes which impel them to the separation”?
3. Next, review the two sections of John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*. In your own words, how does Jefferson use Locke’s ideas in the preamble of the Declaration?
4. According to Jefferson, what was the purpose of government? What does Jefferson suggest should happen whenever government becomes “destructive of the ends for which it was created?” According to Jefferson, how do governments derive their powers?
5. Jefferson noted that “all men are created equal,” suggesting that this was “self-evident.” Speculate as to what he meant by that statement. What sorts of conflicts and misconceptions may have stemmed from this statement?

6. Next, look at the list of grievances that Jefferson lists as reasons that the King has violated the natural rights of the colonists. Below, list the three grievances that you feel are the worst violations. Explain why you believe them to be important. Also, note that Jefferson points to King George III in his list of grievances despite the fact that Parliament passed the acts and approved the taxes that led to the colonists calling for independence. The King, on the other hand, was a monarch with limited power. Why would Jefferson blame the King for the problems leading to the Declaration? Explain your view.

7. In the summer of 1776, Jefferson may not have recognized that his declaration would be studied and revered by generations. However, the Declaration *has* gained that status over time. Write a paragraph that explaining your view of why that has happened. If you do not feel that the Declaration is revered, explain why.

8. The colonists had been fighting British soldiers for over a year before the Declaration was written and the formal declaration of war against Britain was announced. Why do you feel it took so long for the colonists to formally announce a declaration of war against the British?

9. John Locke died in 1704, over 70 years before Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. In your estimate, would Locke be happy with the way Jefferson used his *Two Treatises* to justify independence from Britain, which was Locke's native country? Below, either write a fictitious letter from Locke to Jefferson critiquing his use of *Two Treatises* in the Declaration of Independence or a fictitious letter from Jefferson to Locke explaining how he adapted Locke's theory in writing the Declaration.