

The Declaration of Independence

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. 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?
4. Jefferson noted that "all men are created equal," suggesting that this was "self evident." Speculate as to what he meant by that statement. What sort of conflicts and misconceptions may have stemmed from this statement?
5. Why do you think that Jefferson addresses King George III 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.
6. Look at the list of 27 grievances that Jefferson lists as reasons that the King has violated the natural rights of the colonists. List three grievances that you feel are the worst violations. Explain why you believe them to be important.
7. In the summer of 1776, Jefferson may not have recognized that his declaration would be studied and revered by generations. Why do you think that has happened?
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 think it took so long for the colonists to formally announce a declaration of war against the British?