

from The Declaration of Independence

Public Document by Thomas Jefferson

COMMON CORE

RI 4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including technical meanings. **RI 5** Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. **RI 8** Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy. **L 3a** Apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading.

DID YOU KNOW?

Thomas Jefferson ...

- played the violin.
- was an amateur inventor.
- developed the policy of the separation of church and state.
- favored the rights of the states over the federal government.
- died on July 4, the same day as his friend and political rival, John Adams.

Jefferson's home at Monticello

Meet the Author

Thomas Jefferson 1743–1826

Thomas Jefferson was one of the most accomplished founding fathers. Active in the cause for independence, he was governor of Virginia during the Revolutionary War and U.S. minister to France afterward. He also served the new country as the first secretary of state, the second vice-president, and the third president. As president, he acquired the vast Louisiana Territory west of the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, essentially doubling the size of the country. But more important than any political office he held was the lasting impact of Jefferson's ideals of liberty and self-government so eloquently expressed in the Declaration of Independence.

Brilliant Legal Mind The son of a surveyor and gentleman farmer, Jefferson was born into a life of privilege in rural Virginia. Educated at the College of William and Mary, he was tutored in the law and practiced successfully before entering politics at age 26. As a member of the colonial Virginia legislature, he fell in with a group of radicals, among them Patrick Henry. Lacking Henry's oratorical gifts, Jefferson distinguished himself by his legal writing. Significantly, Jefferson's indelible mark on

American life came largely from the many legal documents and laws he wrote promoting democracy.

Passion for Learning Jefferson had an insatiable curiosity about the world and often indulged in what he called his "canine appetite for reading." In addition to devouring works on the classics, history, law, science, and philosophy, he taught himself architecture from books. He designed his elaborate estate at Monticello and the buildings of the University of Virginia, which he also founded as the embodiment of his principles of education and individual freedom.

The Issue of Slavery Charges of hypocrisy on the issue of slavery have tarnished Jefferson's image as the "apostle of liberty." In his early writings, he denounced slavery and tried unsuccessfully to include the issue in the Declaration. Yet Jefferson always owned slaves—as many as 600 over the course of his lifetime—and in later years, he remained undecided on this issue. A defining conflict of this period in American history, the controversy over slavery is part of the historical context that shaped Jefferson's purpose as an individual and as the author of one of our most important historical documents.

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● TEXT ANALYSIS: ARGUMENT

Jefferson's purpose in the Declaration of Independence was to make a logical argument for independence. An **argument** expresses an opinion on an issue and supports it with reasons and evidence. Beginning with a **claim**, the writer's position on the subject, an argument needs the **support** of reasons and evidence to prove its claim. A sound argument anticipates opposing views and provides **counterarguments** or **counterclaims** as evidence against them.

Jefferson's **purpose** with the Declaration was not simply to support a historically important argument. It was to inspire his **audience**—his fellow colonists, as well as future generations of Americans—to aspire to the ideals set forth in this document. As you read, look for these elements of an argument.

● READING SKILL: ANALYZE TEXT STRUCTURE

The Declaration of Independence has four main sections:

1. a **preamble**, or **foreword**, that announces the reason for the document
2. a **declaration** of people's natural rights and relationship to government
3. a long **list** of complaints against George III, the British king
4. a **conclusion** that formally states America's independence

Each section expresses abstract and complex ideas. As you read, use a chart like the one shown to identify the most important point of each section and to record some of the complex ideas put forth by the author.

Section	Main Point	Complex Ideas
1 Preamble lines 1–6	Independence requires a public statement of reasons.	The laws of nature and God support justice.

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Match each vocabulary word in the first column with the word or phrase in the second column that is closest in meaning.

- | | |
|--------------|------------------|
| 1. abdicate | a. correction |
| 2. redress | b. tyranny |
| 3. despotism | c. treachery |
| 4. impel | d. abandon |
| 5. mercenary | e. drive |
| 6. perfidy | f. hired soldier |

When is REBELLION justified?

Many young people harbor a spirit of rebellion—against parents, teachers, bosses, rules, or any situation that “just isn’t fair!” But how often do you attempt to explain your rebellion logically? In June of 1776, Thomas Jefferson and other colonial leaders had decided to rebel against British rule. But they needed to justify their dangerous action—to themselves, to the king, and to the world.

DISCUSS In a small group, think of several situations in which an individual or a group rebelled against a perceived injustice. The situations could be any of the following:

- local—an incident in your school or community, for example
- global—such as demonstrations against global trade policies
- historical—such as the American, French, or Russian revolutions

Then, as a group, evaluate the reasons for each rebellion and explain which ones you think are justified.



The Declaration of Independence

Thomas Jefferson

BACKGROUND In September 1774, 56 delegates met in Philadelphia at the First Continental Congress to draw up a declaration of colonial rights. They agreed to reconvene in May 1775 if their demands weren't met. At this Second Continental Congress, Thomas Jefferson joined Benjamin Franklin and John Adams on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. The task of writing it fell to Jefferson. Although Congress made many changes to the list of grievances, Jefferson's declaration of rights remained untouched—an abiding testament to “self-evident” truths for the nation and the world.

Analyze Visuals ►

This is an original copy of the Declaration. What might be some of the advantages of having the whole document appear on one large sheet of paper?

In Congress, July 4, 1776

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 the separation. **A**

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. That, to secure these
10 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 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,

impel (ĩm-pěł') v. to drive forward; force

A ARGUMENT

What **claim** does Jefferson present in the preamble of the Declaration, and what **support** does he say he will provide?

all experience hath shown 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
20 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. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity that constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present King of Great Britain¹ is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having, in direct object, the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world. **B**

despotism (dēs'pə-tīz'əm)
n. government by a ruler with unlimited power

He has refused his assent to laws² the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. **C**
30 He has forbidden his Governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and, when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

B ARGUMENT

What opposing claim does Jefferson anticipate in lines 15–22? What **counterargument** does he make at the end of this paragraph, and what does he say he is about to do?

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless these people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature—a right inestimable to them, and formidable to tyrants only.

C TEXT STRUCTURE

Why might the list of complaints make up the largest part of the four-part structure?

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measure.

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing, with manly
40 firmness, his invasions on the rights of the people.

Language Coach

Multiple-Meaning Words

Dissolved can mean “caused to pass into solution” (such as sugar dissolved in tea). However, in line 39, *dissolved*, means “ended” or “terminated.” Why would the king want to dissolve the representative houses?

He has refused, for a long time after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the State remaining, in the meantime, exposed to all dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population³ of these States; for that purpose obstructing the laws for the naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws
50 for establishing judiciary powers.

He has made judges dependent on his will alone for the tenure of their offices,⁴ and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.⁵

1. **the present King of Great Britain:** George III, who reigned from 1760 to 1820.

2. **refused his assent to laws:** Laws passed in the colonies needed the king's approval; sometimes it took years for laws to be approved or rejected.

3. **to prevent the population:** to keep the population from growing.

4. **the tenure of their offices:** their job security.

5. **eat out their substance:** use up their resources.



Declaration of Independence in Congress, at the Independence Hall, Philadelphia, July 4, 1776 (1819), John Trumbull. Oil on canvas. The Granger Collection, New York.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without the consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the military independent of, and superior to, the civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our
60 constitutions,⁶ and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;

For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these States;

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;

For imposing taxes on us without our consent;

For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury;

For transporting us beyond the seas, to be tried for pretended offenses;

70 For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province,⁷
establishing there an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries, so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies;

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering, fundamentally, the forms of our governments;

For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. **D**

6. **subject us . . . our constitutions:** Parliament had passed the Declaratory Act in 1766, stating that the king and Parliament could make laws for the colonies.

7. **a neighboring province:** the province of Quebec, which at the time extended south to the Ohio River and west to the Mississippi.

COMMON CORE L 3a

D TEXT STRUCTURE

Reread lines 59–76 and study the arrangement of paragraphs. In lines 62–76, Jefferson lists violations the English king has committed against the colonies. Jefferson emphasizes these violations by devoting a separate paragraph to each one and by using **parallel structure**. Each paragraph begins with the preposition *for*, followed by a gerund such as *quartering* or *protecting*. Read lines 59–76 aloud. How does Jefferson's use of parallelism and paragraph structure contribute to the persuasive impact of these lines?

He has **abdicated** government here, by declaring us out of his protection, and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns,⁸ and destroyed
80 the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign **mercenaries** to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and **perfidy** scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.


He has constrained our fellow citizens, taken captive on the high seas, to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrection amongst us,⁹ and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule
90 of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for **redress**, in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have we been wanting in our attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them, from time to time, of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity; and we have conjured them, by the ties of our common
100 kindred, to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. **E**

They, too, have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity.¹⁰ We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity which denounces our separation; and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. **F**

WE, THEREFORE, THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude¹¹ of our intentions, do, in the name and by the 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; that they are absolved
110 from all allegiance to the British crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved; and that, as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And, for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor. 

abdicate (ăb'dī-kāt') *v.* to give up responsibility for

mercenary (mûr'sə-nēr'ē) *n.* a professional soldier hired to fight in a foreign army

perfidy (pûr'fī-dē) *n.* treachery

redress (rĭ-drēs') *n.* the correction of a wrong; compensation

E GRAMMAR AND STYLE
Reread lines 98–101. Notice how Jefferson uses a **compound-complex sentence**, which has two or more independent clauses and one or more subordinate clauses, in order to show the complex relationships between ideas.

F ARGUMENT
Reread lines 95–104. Notice how Jefferson uses the first-person plural pronouns *we* and *our* to identify with his **audience** and to inspire unity of **purpose**. Examine Jefferson's **diction**, or choice of words. How does the language of these closing paragraphs support the writer's inspirational **tone** or attitude toward the idea of independence? Support your answer with evidence from the Declaration.

8. **plundered . . . our towns:** American seaports such as Norfolk, Virginia, had already been shelled.

9. **excited . . . amongst us:** George III had encouraged slaves to rise up and rebel against their masters.

10. **deaf to . . . consanguinity:** The British have ignored pleas based on their common ancestry with the colonists.

11. **rectitude:** morally correct behavior or thinking.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Name three complaints that the colonists had against the king.
2. **Recall** What rights are specified in the Declaration?
3. **Clarify** What does Jefferson say is the purpose of government?
4. **Clarify** According to the Declaration, who gives people their rights?

Text Analysis

5. **Make Inferences** The Declaration clearly takes aim at the abuses of King George to justify the colonists' **rebellion**. But reread lines 102–104. To what extent does the document hold the British people responsible? What is the new relationship declared between Americans and their “British brethren,” and how might it differ from the old?
6. **Analyze Elements of an Argument** How does Jefferson's awareness of his audience affect his diction—the words he chooses and the manner of their arrangement? Explain the persuasive appeal of the following words and phrases:
 - “We hold these truths to be self-evident” (line 7)
 - “endowed by their Creator” (line 8)
 - “unalienable rights” (line 8)
 - “secure these rights” (lines 9–10)
7. **Evaluate Text Structure** Review the chart you filled in. How effective is Jefferson's four-part structure in stating the colonists' case? Would reordering the parts make any difference? Explain your answer.
8. **Evaluate Elements of an Argument** Identify the major claim and the support given in the Declaration. In your opinion, is the support sufficient for the claim? Does it have to be? Explain your answer.

Text Criticism

9. **Historical Context** Jefferson's celebrated statement “All men are created equal” only applied to white men at the time. How has the meaning of Jefferson's statement changed over time? How has it stayed the same?

*When is **REBELLION** justified?*

Which set of reasons for breaking away from British rule strikes you as most important—the colonists' philosophical ideals, the hardships colonists suffered as a result of British policies, or the king's response to colonists' complaints? Explain your answer.

COMMON CORE

RI 1 Cite textual evidence to support inferences drawn from the text. **RI 4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including technical meanings. **RI 5** Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. **RI 8** Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy.

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Choose the word that is not related in meaning to the other words.

1. (a) disloyalty, (b) perfidy, (c) honesty, (d) treachery
2. (a) despotism, (b) dictatorship, (c) tyranny, (d) righteousness
3. (a) monarch, (b) ruler, (c) mercenary, (d) king
4. (a) redress, (b) model, (c) remedy, (d) compensation
5. (a) abandon, (b) renounce, (c) confiscate, (d) abdicate
6. (a) mobilize, (b) impel, (c) propel, (d) restrain

WORD LIST

abdicate
despotism
impel
mercenary
perfidy
redress

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• document • illustrate • interpret • promote • reveal

The Declaration of Independence **reveals** many hardships the colonists suffered at the hands of King George. Write a short paragraph discussing how these trials affected the colonists and eventually led them to **promote** the cause for freedom. Use three Academic Vocabulary words in your paragraph.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: POLITICAL WORDS

The content areas of social studies and political science use many terms to describe systems of government. Some terms identify specific types of government; others, like the vocabulary word *despotism*, describe the practices of a government. It is useful to understand the meanings of such terms.

PRACTICE Choose the political word described by each numbered item. Then use a dictionary to trace the etymology of each word.

oligarchy regency republic socialism totalitarianism

1. a few people have the ruling power
2. a person rules in place of the regular ruler, who may be ill or too young
3. production of goods and services is under the control of government
4. one political group rules and suppresses all opposition, often with force
5. citizens elect representatives to manage the government

COMMON CORE

RI 4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including technical meanings. **L 4c** Consult general and specialized reference materials to determine or clarify a word's etymology. **L 6** Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

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Language

◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Vary Sentence Structure

Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 244. Like most lawyers, who have to be precise as well as thorough, Jefferson uses **complex** and **compound-complex** sentences to pack in meaning.

- A **complex sentence** has one main clause (as in yellow), which can stand alone, and one or more subordinate clauses (as in green), which cannot.

A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. (lines 93–94)

- A **compound-complex sentence** has two or more independent clauses (as in yellow) and one or more subordinate clauses (as in green).

Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity that constrains them to alter their former systems of government. (lines 22–24)

PRACTICE Rewrite each pair of sentences as a complex or compound-complex sentence. Use the conjunction shown in parentheses.

EXAMPLE

The king exploits the people. The people move toward rebellion. (after)
After the king exploits the people, the people move toward rebellion.

1. The people declare their grievances with British rule. The British king and parliament do not listen. (when)
2. The parliament learns of the dissatisfaction of the colonists. The parliament imposes even harsher laws. (as soon as)

READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Expand your understanding of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence by responding to this prompt. Then, use the **revising tips** to improve your declaration.

WRITING PROMPT

TAKE A STAND The Declaration of Independence has served as a model in several historical instances. Write a **declaration** for a group or individual of your choosing. Your declaration should have at least **three paragraphs** and be modeled on the Declaration of Independence.

REVISING TIPS

- Include a brief declaration of rights.
- List at least ten complaints.
- Conclude with a resolution.

COMMON CORE

L 3a Vary syntax for effect, consulting references for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading. **W 1** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Interactive
Revision

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