

Name

Declaration of Independence: What Are You Trying to Say?

Directions: I have overheard you, at times, complain about the treatment of young people. Complaints like these motivated the Founding Fathers at the time of the American Revolution.

You will be given time to list complaints they have about the treatment of young people. The complaints should be of a general nature (for example: lunch should be longer, eighth graders should be able to see PG13 movies in school, etc.).

There are moments when all of us are more eager to express what's wrong rather than think about possible solutions. There is no reason to think people were any different in 1776. It's important to understand that the Declaration was one step in a process involving careful thought and attempts to solve their problems

Some questions I want you to consider when writing your lists are **(answer in the space provided):**

1. Who should you send your complaints to?
2. Why that person?
3. What reasons would you give for your decision to write out your complaints?
4. What makes you think your complaints are worthwhile? Why should things be changed?
5. What kinds of events inspired your complaints?
6. Have you already tried to make any changes in how you are treated? In what way?
7. Is it possible to say in a single sentence what it is you really want to happen?
8. How long would take time to change the system to what you want?
9. Would you be willing to sign your name to this list of complaints even if it were going to be seen and read by many people?

The Declaration of Independence was created around complaints about the treatment of the colonies under British rule. In this activity, you are given the opportunity to write a document based on your own complaints; however, your resulting "declaration" might be more convincing if based on some models already proven effective.

Below are excerpts from the Declaration of Independence. There is no need to read the entire document at this point. The immediate goal is to understand the structure of the document and the basic intent of each section. Use the following section-by-section questions to help yourself understand the structure and goals of the Declaration and become better able to write your own declaration of independence.

Section 1- Preamble: “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.”

10. What reason(s) did the Founding Fathers give for their decision to write out a declaration?

Section 2- Statement of Beliefs: “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 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 [...] But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object reveals a design to reduce them under absolute Tyranny, 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 which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.”

11. What beliefs did the Founding Fathers declare they held?

Section 3- List of Complaints (I changed the wording of the original complaints):

- He won't let us pass laws we need for everybody's good.
- Even when we do pass laws, he won't sign them so they can go into effect.
- He tried to force men to give up their right to make laws.
- He calls men together to make laws in the most inconvenient times and places, so that they won't be able to go discuss the new laws.
- He won't let new settlers come to America, and he won't let the settlers take over new land from the Native Americans.
- He won't let us choose our own judges, and instead he chooses them all himself, so they're all on his side.
- He sends lots of new government officials that we don't want, and he makes us pay for them.

- He sends lots of English soldiers here when there isn't even a war, and makes us let them live in our own houses.
- He tells us these soldiers can do whatever they want and don't have to obey the law.
- He won't let us buy and sell things from wherever we want. We can only buy things from England.
- He makes us pay all kinds of taxes without asking us about it.
- He won't let us have a jury for our trials, only a judge.
- He sends people accused of crimes far away to England for their trials.
- He tries to get people to revolt and tries to get the "Indian Savages" to attack us.

12. What are a few (at least 3) of the complaints?

13. Are any specific events mentioned that we have discussed before? If not, is the information given sometimes sufficient to figure out to which events the complaints refer?

Section 4- Statement of Past Attempts to Address Complaints: “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 fairness [...] They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of close connection. We must, therefore [...] hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.”

14. In what way(s) did the framers claim to have already tried in addressing the complaints?

Section 5- Declaration of Independence: “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; that they are Absolved 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.”

15. What will change in the colonies as a result of the Declaration?

Section 6- Signers of the Declaration

Georgia:

Button Gwinnett
Lyman Hall
George Walton

Column 2

North Carolina:

William Hooper
Joseph Hewes
John Penn

South Carolina:

Edward Rutledge
Thomas Heyward, Jr.
Thomas Lynch, Jr.
Arthur Middleton

Column 3

Massachusetts:

John Hancock

Maryland:

Samuel Chase
William Paca
Thomas Stone
Charles Carroll of Carrollton

Virginia:

George Wythe
Richard Henry Lee

Thomas Jefferson

Benjamin Harrison

Thomas Nelson, Jr.

Francis Lightfoot Lee

Carter Braxton

Column 4

Pennsylvania:

Robert Morris
Benjamin Rush
Benjamin Franklin
John Morton
George Clymer
James Smith
George Taylor
James Wilson
George Ross

Delaware:

Caesar Rodney
George Read
Thomas McKean

Column 5

New York:

William Floyd
Philip Livingston
Francis Lewis

Lewis Morris

New Jersey:

Richard Stockton
John Witherspoon
Francis Hopkinson
John Hart
Abraham Clark

Column 6

New Hampshire:

Josiah Bartlett
William Whipple

Massachusetts:

Samuel Adams
John Adams
Robert Treat Paine
Elbridge Gerry

Rhode Island:

Stephen Hopkins
William Ellery

Connecticut:

Roger Sherman
Samuel Huntington
William Williams
Oliver Wolcott

New Hampshire:

Matthew Thornton

16. Which signers do you recognize?

Publish and Declare!

Directions: Now you will begin to draft your own declaration on a separate sheet of paper. The transcript of the Declaration of Independence should serve as a model. Your draft should contain the same 6 sections (Preamble, Statement of Beliefs, List of Complaints, Statement of Past Attempts to Address Complaints, Declaration of Independence, and Signature). You can model some of your statement after the Declaration. For example, you can begin with the words "When, in the course of human events...." Good luck and have fun!

My Declaration of Independence

Section 1- Preamble: Why did you decide to write this declaration?

Section 2- Statement of Beliefs: What rights do you believe you have as a student, daughter, son, teammate, etc. that are being taken away by the group you are declaring independence from?

Section 3- List of Complaints: What are your complaints about the group you are splitting away from?

Section 4- Statement of Past Attempts to Address Complaints: How have you tried to fix your situation in the past? IF you have not tried, what has stopped you from doing so?

Section 5- Declaration of Independence: Declare your independence and tell me what will change about your life from becoming independent.

Section 6- Signature