

The Declaration of Independence: A Close Reading

Text-Dependent Questions

Use the following method to address each of the questions below.

- **Discuss** the questions in groups of 2 – 3.
- **Write** what you think is the *best* answer to each question.

Text Under Discussion	Guiding Questions for Students
<p style="text-align: center;">In Congress, July 4, 1776</p> <p>The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America</p>	<p>1. What can you infer about this reading from the opening “the Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America?” What kind of text is this? What do you expect this text will be about?</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>2. What is the tone of this text in this passage? Which words in the text lead you to that conclusion?</p> <p>3. What has “become necessary”? What does this phrase imply about the actions taken by colonist prior to the declaration?</p> <p>4. What does labeling the Americans “one people” and the British “another” say about their union?</p> <p>5. How does the author’s choice of the words “dissolve” and “separation” illustrate his point of view regarding the nature of this disunion?</p> <p>6. What “entitled” Americans to claim this separation? How does this justification affect their case for independence?</p>

Text Under Discussion	Guiding Questions for Students
<p>We hold these truths to be <u>self-evident</u>, 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, <u>deriving</u> 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, 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.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. What "self-evident" truths does the author identify? 8. How does the author's choice of the phrases "self-evident" truths and "unalienable rights" affect his argument? 9. Why are "governments instituted among men?" 10. What does "deriving their powers from the <i>consent of the governed</i>" mean? 11. Under what circumstances do the people have the right to "alter or abolish" their government? 12. According to the author, how should any new government be created? 13. Explain the key point in author's argument in <i>this portion</i> of the text.

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience **hath shewn**, 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 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 which constrains them to alter their former **Systems of Government**. — 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. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a **candid** world.

14. Explain the author's reasoning for declaring independence at this point in time.
15. Which words in this portion of the text illustrate the author's point of view on declaring independence from Great Britain?
16. How does the author's choice of words affect the argument for declaring independence?
17. Summarize the message the author is sharing with the "candid world?" Cite examples from the entire preamble.