

The Declaration of Independence

While the British and colonists were fighting on the battlefields in the 1770s, other battles were being waged on paper. In January of 1776, a man named Thomas Paine wrote a pamphlet called "Common Sense." This book listed in simple language the reasons that America needed to be independent. Paine argued that independence from Britain was just "common sense." The small book was so popular that it sold 120,000 copies in three months. Half a year after "Common Sense" was published, the colonies began voting for independence. Thus, "Common Sense" paved the way for one of the most famous documents in history: the Declaration of Independence.

In June of 1776, the Second Continental Congress asked a small committee, including a brilliant young man named Thomas Jefferson, to write a document that would declare to the world why America was fighting for its independence from Britain. Jefferson was the one who ended up putting the words on paper. The document Jefferson wrote was the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence was the colonists' way of announcing to the British king and Parliament that the colonies no longer belonged to the British. The colonists would

rule themselves. In July of 1776, fifty-six men signed the Declaration. They risked their lives when they signed the document because their act was an act of treason against King George III, who could have them beheaded. Copies of the Declaration of Independence were read far and wide to cheering crowds.

The Declaration of Independence had three parts. The first part explained why the colonies had a right to be independent. The next part listed twenty-seven ways King George III had deprived the colonists of their freedom. The third part said that the colonies were now a free and independent nation that was ready to take its rightful place among the other nations. The Declaration made it clear that government belonged to the people. Most important, it said that all people were equal, that people had rights, and that the government had to protect those rights.

Some of the most famous words are "When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands . . ." and "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."

Answer the Following

1. What was "Common Sense?" _____

2. What was common sense to Thomas Paine? _____

3. What is the Declaration of Independence? _____

4. What are the most important things the Declaration of Independence said? _____
