Declaration of Independence

Concept Vocabulary
You will encounter the following words as you read the Declaration of Independence. Before reading, note how familiar you are with each word. Then, rank the words in order from most familiar (1) to least familiar (6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD</th>
<th>YOUR RANKING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unalienable</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>constrains</td>
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<tr>
<td>tyranny</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>assent</td>
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<tr>
<td>acquiesce</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>rectitude</td>
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After completing the first read, come back to the concept vocabulary and review your rankings. Mark changes to your original rankings as needed.

First Read NONFICTION
Apply these strategies as you conduct your first read. You will have an opportunity to complete the close-read notes after your first read.

NOTICE the general ideas of the text. What is it about? Who is involved?
ANNOTATE by marking vocabulary and key passages you want to revisit.
CONNECT ideas within the selection to what you already know and what you have already read.
RESPOND by completing the Comprehension Check and by writing a brief summary of the selection.

STANDARDS
Reading Informational Text
By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
About the Author

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826)

Author of the Declaration of Independence

When you look at all of Thomas Jefferson’s achievements, it seems almost nothing was beyond his reach. Not only did he help our nation win its independence and serve as its third president, but he also founded the University of Virginia, helped establish the public school system, designed his own home, invented a type of elevator for sending food from floor to floor, and created the decimal system for American money. He was a skilled violinist, an art enthusiast, and a brilliant writer.

Revolutionary Leader

Born into a wealthy Virginia family, Jefferson attended the College of William and Mary and went on to earn a law degree. While serving in the Virginia House of Burgesses, he became an outspoken defender of American rights. When conflict between the colonists and the British erupted into revolution, Jefferson emerged as a leader in the effort to win independence.

Valued Statesman

When the war ended, Jefferson served as the American minister to France for several years. He then served as the nation’s first secretary of state and second vice president before becoming president in 1801.

Building the Nation

While in office, Jefferson negotiated with France to buy a tract of land extending from the southern coast of Louisiana north into what is now Canada. This vast expanse of land included all of present-day Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. It also included most of North and South Dakota, northeastern New Mexico, northern Texas, and portions of Minnesota, Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming. This enormous real-estate deal became known as the Louisiana Purchase, and it was one of the defining achievements of Jefferson’s presidency. In a single treaty, Jefferson added more than 800,000 uncharted square miles to the holdings of the nation, effectively doubling its size.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition

Jefferson had long wanted to pursue exploration of the Pacific Northwest. The completion of the Louisiana Purchase strengthened his resolve. He convinced Congress to allocate $2,500 to fund an expedition, writing:

“The river Missouri, and Indians inhabiting it, are not as well known as rendered desirable by their connection with the Mississippi, and consequently with us . . . . An intelligent officer, with ten or twelve chosen men . . . might explore the whole line, even to the Western Ocean. . . .”

The “intelligent officer” he had in mind was his secretary, Captain Meriwether Lewis (1774–1809). Captain William Clark became co-leader of the group, which became known as the Corps of Discovery. Between 1804 and 1806, the team completed an 8,000-mile trek from St. Louis to the source of the Missouri River, across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific coast, and back to Missouri.

A Patriotic Departure

On the morning of July 4, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson died at the age of 83. John Adams, Jefferson’s fellow contributor to the Declaration of Independence, died several hours later, after his longtime friend. Adams’s last words were “Thomas Jefferson still survives.”
BACKGROUND
The Continental Congress was formed in 1774 by the American colonies to coordinate resistance to British laws considered by most colonists to be unfair. In the summer of 1776, after about a year of war against Britain, representatives met to consider an official break with Britain.

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.

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.

unalienable (uhn AYL yuh nuh buh) adj. impossible to take away or give up
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. Prudence,
indeed, will dictate that governments long established should
not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly 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,¹ 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. The history of
the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries
and usurpations,¹ 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.

He has refused his assent to laws the most wholesome and
necessary for the public good.

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.

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

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 measures.

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

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 mean time exposed to all the dangers of
invasion from without, and convulsions within.

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

1. usurpations (yoo zuhr PAY shuh nz) n. unlawful or violent seizures of power or
possessions.
He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, 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.

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 constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering\(^2\) 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 seas to be tried for pretended offenses:

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province, establishing therein 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.

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, burned our towns, and destroyed 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 insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule 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

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2. quartering v. housing.
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 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 kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity.  

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.

We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, 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,
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.

The 56 signatures on the Declaration appear in the positions indicated:

**Column 1**
- **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
Comprehension Check
Complete the following items after you finish your first read.

1. What does Jefferson state directly as the reason this declaration had to be written?

2. According to Jefferson, what is a people’s duty when their government is abusive?

3. What new relationship between Great Britain and the United States is announced in this document?

4. Notebook Write a summary of the Declaration of Independence to confirm your understanding of the text.

RESEARCH
Research to Clarify Choose at least one unfamiliar detail from the text. Briefly research that detail. In what way does the information you learned shed light on an aspect of the document?

Research to Explore Conduct research to find out how some signers of the Declaration of Independence expressed their convictions about the document.
Close Read the Text

1. This model, from paragraph 2 of the text, shows two sample annotations, along with questions and conclusions. Close read the passage, and find another detail to annotate. Then, write a question and your conclusion.

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ANNOTATE: This is very grand language, referring to all of human history.
QUESTION: Why does Jefferson present this argument in the context of the entirety of human history?
CONCLUDE: Jefferson is saying that the severing of political ties between nations is of momentous importance.

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, . . . a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

ANNOTATE: These words seem to be gentle.
QUESTION: Why might Jefferson have chosen such language?
CONCLUDE: Perhaps he wanted to make his argument sound reasoned and logical, and not angry.
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2. For more practice, go back into the text and complete the close-read notes.

3. Revisit a section of the text you found important during your first read. Annotate what you notice. Ask yourself questions such as “Why did the author make this choice?” What can you conclude?

Analyze the Text

1. **Make Inferences** Why does Jefferson begin with points about human rights before discussing the colonists’ specific grievances?

2. (a) **Interpret** What does Jefferson mean by saying that people do not change governments for “light reasons”? (b) **Speculate** Why might people be more inclined to put up with a government that is less than satisfactory rather than change it?

3. (a) **Generalize** According to Jefferson, what has been the king’s attitude toward the laws of the colonies? (b) **Analyze** Why is that attitude an important factor in the decision to declare independence?

4. **Historical Perspectives** The signers of the Declaration of Independence knew that their announcement could mean war with powerful, well-equipped Britain. In your opinion, why isn’t that idea more prominent in the document?

5. **Essential Question:** What is the meaning of freedom? What have you learned about American freedoms from reading this text? How does Jefferson connect the meaning of freedom to the idea of human rights?
Analyze Craft and Structure

Author's Purpose: Argumentation An argument is writing that is meant to get readers to think in a certain way or take a particular action. In an effective argument, the writer presents reasons and supports them with convincing evidence. He or she also uses a variety of persuasive appeals, or ways of framing ideas for specific effect:

- **Appeals to Emotion**: ideas or language that attempts to influence readers’ feelings; appeals to emotion may include charged language—strong words with powerful connotations—as well as references to the divine, references to concepts like justice or fairness, and stories or anecdotes.

- **Appeals to Logic**: ideas or language that connects to readers’ rationality or reason; appeals to logic emphasize relationships between evidence, such as facts, and consequences or outcomes.

- **Appeals to Authority**: ideas or language that suggests the writer has special expertise or demonstrates character in a way that merits readers’ attention on the subject.

Practice

Notebook Respond to these questions.

1. (a) What appeal to emotion does Jefferson use in paragraph 1? (b) Why is this an important technique for him to use as he begins his argument?

2. (a) Mark examples of appeals to emotion in this excerpt from paragraph 2.

   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. 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.

   (b) How does the description of Great Britain and its king constitute charged language? Explain, citing specific words.

3. (a) Which kind of appeal is represented by Jefferson’s organized list of grievances? (b) How does the evidence he provides add to his argument?

4. Jefferson wrote this document during the Age of Reason, an era characterized by logic and scientific methodology. How does the Declaration of Independence reflect Jefferson’s faith in reason?
Concept Vocabulary

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Why These Words? These concept vocabulary words convey ideas about power and rights. For example, Jefferson refers to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as unalienable rights. He states that the king’s actions established absolute tyranny over the colonies.

1. How does the concept vocabulary help readers grasp the issues leading to the Declaration of Independence?

2. What other words in the selection connect to these concepts?

Practice

Notebook Complete these activities.

1. Use each concept vocabulary word in a sentence that demonstrates your understanding of the word’s meaning.

2. In two of your sentences, replace the concept vocabulary word with a synonym. What is the effect? For example, which sentence is stronger? Which one makes the sentence seem more positive or more negative?

Word Study

Latin Root: -rect- The Latin root -rect- means “right” or “straight.” It is the basis for many English words, including such mathematical terms as rectangular (having right angles) and rectilinear (formed by straight lines).

1. Write a definition of rectitude that demonstrates your understanding of its Latin root.

2. Use a print or online college-level dictionary to find the meanings of rectify as the word relates to chemistry and as it relates to electronics.
Conventions and Style

Changes in Syntax and Usage  Language changes over time. During the eighteenth century, when Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, English spelling was almost identical to that of today’s English. However, there are elements of Jefferson’s style—the style of his era—that may seem old-fashioned to today’s readers.

• Syntax: the structure of sentences. Some of Jefferson’s sentences are very long by today’s standards; in fact, the second paragraph of the Declaration is a lengthy single sentence.

• Usage: the way in which a word or phrase is used. Jefferson uses some words that would rarely be used—and might even be contested—today. For example, the word consanguinity in paragraph 32 is a term that few modern writers would use.

• Formality: the level of familiarity with which writers address the reader. While there are still ceremonial and public forums that require formal language, American culture is more casual now than it was in the eighteenth century. Both the purpose of the document and the style of the era are reflected in the Declaration’s high level of formality.

Read It

1. Reread paragraphs 1–2 of the Declaration of Independence. Identify four words or phrases that represent an earlier style of English.

2. Locate Jefferson’s use of conjured in paragraph 32. What does the word mean to Jefferson in this context? What does the word often mean today? Use an etymological dictionary or other source to explain how the two meanings are connected by word origin and word history.


Write It

Notebook  Rewrite this excerpt from the Declaration of Independence. Use modern English usage and syntax to express the same meaning. Then, compare the two versions and take note of ways in which each version would likely appeal to different audiences.

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.
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.
Writing to Sources

The Declaration of Independence represents the position of one side in a conflict. There were numerous other colonial writings, including speeches, pamphlets, and essays, that centered on the same conflict. Together, these multiple writings are a record of the ongoing debate over the colonies’ relationship with Britain. Today, debates over public issues often take place in the media—in newspaper articles and editorials.

Assignment

An editorial is a brief argumentative essay that appears in a newspaper or on a news site and expresses a position on an issue. Write an editorial for a local or school newspaper in which you argue your side of an issue that affects your school or community. Use modern syntax and usage, but apply some of Jefferson’s persuasive techniques. For example, present a list of reasons just as Jefferson does in the Declaration of Independence.

Your editorial should include:

- a clear statement of your claim, or position
- a list of reasons that support and clarify your claim
- appeals to emotion, logic, and—if warranted—authority
- a concluding statement that follows from the argument

Vocabulary and Conventions Connection

Consider including several of the concept vocabulary words. Also, remember to use appropriate word choices, grammar, syntax, and a style that makes your ideas clear.

- unalienable
- tyranny
- acquiesce
- constrains
- assent
- rectitude

Reflect on Your Writing

After you have drafted your editorial, answer the following questions.

1. How did writing your editorial help you understand Jefferson’s writing process?

2. Which of the reasons that you listed do you think offers the strongest evidence in support of your argument?

3. Why These Words? The words you choose can greatly increase the effect of your writing. Which words helped you create a clear and memorable argument?
Speaking and Listening

Assignment
You may have listened to the 1957 recording of Senator John F. Kennedy reading the Declaration of Independence. Listen to that recording again and think about his presentation. Then, participate in a class discussion about these questions:

- Would you find it meaningful to hear a modern politician of your choice reading this historical document today? Why or why not?
- Would it be just as meaningful to hear the document read by a classmate or a neighbor? Explain.

1. Think About the Question  Before the discussion, consider the meaning of the Declaration of Independence.
- Does Kennedy’s reading enhance your understanding of the document?
- Which aspects of the Declaration would a modern politician most likely consider important?

2. Prepare Your Contribution  Make some notes for the discussion.
- Which modern politician would you choose as a reader? Why?
- In what ways would a reading from a classmate or a neighbor be more or less meaningful?

3. Discuss the Questions  Keep these principles in mind.
- Speak clearly so that your listeners can follow what you are saying.
- Respond respectfully to the opinions of others.
- Be prepared to answer questions that your teacher or classmates ask about your positions.

4. Listen and Evaluate  As your classmates speak, listen attentively. Decide whether you agree or disagree with their ideas, and why. Contribute your responses with care, and support them with specific examples. In addition, take brief notes that will help as you complete a presentation evaluation guide.

PRESENTATION EVALUATION GUIDE

Rate each statement on a scale of 1 (not demonstrated) to 5 (demonstrated).

☐ Classmates made meaningful contributions to the discussion.
☐ All of the details in the assignment were discussed.
☐ Each person spoke clearly and in an appropriate tone of voice.
☐ Speakers supported their positions with specific examples.