

Directions: After reading and annotating the *Declaration of Independence*, answer the following questions using complete sentences and evidence from the text to support your answers:

1. Who is the audience of the *Declaration of Independence*?

The Declaration of Independence was written to the colonists in particular, as well as the British monarchy. Throughout the declaration, there various uses of the words “our,” “us,” and “we.” One specific example is in the statement “*For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent.*” The use of these words indicates that this is being written directly to the American people, with the British monarchy right behind to effectively convey their stance to them.

2. In the first paragraph of the declaration, Jefferson states the reason for writing this document. What reason does he give?

Jefferson, in the first paragraph, indicates that the purpose of this declaration is to break the current ties between America and Britain, to give freedom to the American people. This can be found when he says, “*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.*”

3. What is the overall issue, problem, or subject of the declaration?

The American people feel that Britain is running “*an absolute Tyranny over these States.*” Furthermore, Jefferson lists specific examples of their tyrannist behavior by stating specific grievances caused by their actions. In order to abolish this and earn their freedom, they feel the only way to take action is by completing separating away from them. The statement, “*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,*” coveys this desire.

4. What is Jefferson's claim? What is the counterclaim?

Jefferson makes the claim that America needs to separate from Britain, due to the problems they have been put through, to make a proper stance and to win their “*unalienable rights.*” He says, “*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,*” stating that this separation is the only possible solution to accomplish this.

The counterclaim he makes is that “*governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes,*” The claim states that long-standing governments should not be modified, as they have been shown to be able to stay in place. However, he refutes this by saying “*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.*” Yes, long established government are shown to work. However, as he says, when they abuse their power, they must be replaced in order to protect one's rights and freedoms.

5. What concrete evidence does Jefferson use to prove his argument against King George? If you were reading this as an American colonist, which of these details or reasons would be the most persuasive to you?

To effectively prove his argument against the British monarchy, he details specific actions that they took that escalated the situation to where it currently stands, to remind them of what he has done and to further prove his point. He states such examples as “*He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures,*” “*For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world,*” and “*For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent.*” These examples provide direct evidence as to why America is fed up with Britain and their abuse of power over them.

6. How does Jefferson’s structure impact his argument?

Jefferson uses a parallel structure approach to effectively convey the resentment America feels towards Britain, and to inflict determination among Americans. Such examples include “*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.*” By describing the specific actions taken by the British, he is able to impose these negative feelings among Americans in a unified way to make their stance known to Britain.

7. What is the effect of Jefferson capitalizing words like “Rights,” “Life,” “Liberty,” “Government,” “Men,” “Oppressions,” etc.?

The capitalization of these words assists in emphasizing the main important points that need to be addressed in this declaration, and to make them clear. When he says, “*that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,*” he is stressing how people are born with those rights, and are entitled to those rights at all costs.

8. Jefferson changes the opening word in his sentences from “He” to “For.” What is the purpose of this shift?

This shift, during the section in which Jefferson lists specific grievances, is intended to create a more assertive tone. He starts out by stating grievances by starting each sentence with “*he,*” and then becomes more assertive as he shifts them to each start with “*for.*”

9. What tone does the final statement of the *Declaration of Independence* display? Is this tone effective in conveying the importance of this document? Why or why not?

To conclude his argument, Jefferson creates an aggressive and assertive tone, which has been slowly building up throughout the argument from the start. This tone he creates is effective in conveying the urgency and importance of this separation, and how this will happen instead of just simply saying “*we should do this.*” Phrases such as “*publish and declare,*” “*mutually pledge,*” and “*absolved from all allegiance,*” further express this.

10. Find and write the dictionary meaning for the word "self-evident." Jefferson mentions four truths, which he says are "self-evident." In a paragraph of at least six sentences, name these truths and argue for or against the notion that they are indeed "self-evident."

Self-evident: not needing to be demonstrated or explained; obvious.

Throughout his argument, Jefferson states four truths. The first truth states "*all men are created equal*." All people are equal, no matter who you are and what your background is. That no matter what, you are entitled to the same rights as everyone else is "*endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*," conveys that all are entitled to live the life that they want to live, and that no government or establishment can dictate how they live it. "*Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed*," explains that government are to be set up to protect these unalienable rights, and that it is not within their power for them to be taken away or taken advantage of. Ultimately, "*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 affect their Safety and Happiness*," states that whenever such government or establishment does indeed take these rights away or takes advantage of them, that it is within the rights of the people to modify or abolish it with something new that works for them. In the end, these truths are indeed self-evident, as they are essential parts required to operate a free and equal society for all. Without them, people would live a life according to one's standards, not the way they want to live. We must continue to stand up for our rights, as they are the key to a functioning and happy life.