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The Declaration of Independence: Be Revolting



The Declaration of Independence is clearly important because we celebrate it with such cool fire works. And who doesn't like to grill outside? What is up with that document that provides us with such a sweet holiday (even though we don't get to miss school for it)?

The Declaration of Independence was not required to declare war against Britain. It was not needed to become a nation independent of Great Britain. Nonetheless, the Continental Congress asked Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Robert Livingston, Roger Sherman, and Ben Franklin to write a declaration to unify the states and to solicit the recognition and even support from other European nations. Writing the draft fell to Jefferson, although Franklin and Adams made some edits before it was further revised and approved in Congress. All who signed faced possible death for treason if they lost the war. You're either all in or all out, because King George has your name.

For generations people from around the world have drawn upon Jefferson's Declaration to strengthen their own struggles against tyranny. The Declaration of Independence is important because it eloquently articulates the Founding Father's reasons for the colonies' break with Great Britain and America's vision for its future. The document lays out what scholars today refer to as our American creed: the shared set of beliefs that Americans support. Although our laws are not required to follow the Declaration of Independence as they are the Constitution, the Declaration informs our sense of collective identity- who we are as a people.



At age 32 Jefferson was selected to write the draft because he had a proven track record of writing well. With over 18,000 known letters, historians have ample evidence to support claims of Jefferson's skill as a writer. Jefferson borrowed ideas from the Enlightenment to begin the document. However, most attention was given to the list of grievances. Reports indicate that

Jefferson did not like the changes the Continental Congress made, but he suffered in silence without raising any public objections to the changes made.

Although mostly silent during the Convention, Jefferson's words still eternally speak to struggling people around the world. His words lead the American Revolution. At one time or another we have all wanted to rise up and revolt against our oppressors as Jefferson did 230+ years ago. It is right to revolt. Finally, here is your chance to be revolting. You will write your own Declaration of Independence on behalf of an oppressed or minority group. Easy: simply model yours after TJ's.

There are six parts to the Declaration of Independence:

I. The introduction. This is the first paragraph, and its purpose is to explain why write the document. In other words, the introduction explains why they declared independence.

II. In the second paragraph Jefferson gives the operating assumptions. He explains what we know to be true of the nature of the two groups and the nature of the relationship between the two groups. Jefferson does not include grievances (complaints) in this section, rather he explains what the proper role of each party is and includes some of the rights the founding fathers considered most important.

III. This section lists the grievances or complaints against King George III. It was the most hotly debated section at the Continental Congress.

IV. This section comprises two paragraphs that begin "In every stage..." and "Nor have We been wanting..." They explain the colonies role in the dispute. A quick glance at these two paragraphs clearly indicates the colonies have done everything right and have no blame in causing the dispute with Britain.

V. The last two paragraphs (mostly the second to last paragraph) describes what the world will look like with America independent of Britain. It describes how the relationship with Britain will be different and how America itself will be different.

VI. Signatures. The Declaration is signed by representatives from all colonies except Georgia.

You will declare independence on behalf of a group by writing a declaration modeled on Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. Your declaration will have the same six parts that I listed above and will imitate the language of Jefferson's document. Here we go:

1. Choose a group to represent. Some possible ideas include:

Women in 1776

Women in 2009

African-Americans in 1776

African Americans in 2009

Native Americans

Lynnwood

Skateboarders

Salmon

Students of MHS

History students of Mr. Shaw

Asian Americans (especially during WWII)  
Gays and Lesbians  
Differently-abled Americans  
Religious groups  
Animals  
Laborers

Teens with parents  
Workers at the "Job from Hell"  
Vegetarians  
Washingtonians  
Cars  
Taxpayers

Let me know if you would like to do something not listed above.

2. Read through the Declaration and select at least two sentences or phrases to imitate from each of the above mentioned sections, except the grievances. Highlight the two sentences or phrases that you will imitate in each paragraph. I will collect those. The sentences or phrases that you imitate should reflect either an important idea or something that you feel may represent part of our American creed.

3. Now you are ready to begin writing. For each of the six parts of your declaration you will do for your group what Jefferson did for the American colonies. Your declaration will be arranged as follows:

I. The first paragraph is the **introduction**. Its purpose is to explain why you deserve independence. This should not refer to any specific grievance, but should give a general and more "big picture" view of why your group should be independent.

II. Provide your **operating assumptions**. Explain what you know to be true of the nature of the two groups and the nature of the relationship between the two groups. Again, please do not include grievances in this section, rather explain the proper role of each party and include some of the rights you consider most important.

III. This section lists the **grievances** or complaints against your oppressor. Have fun with this section, Congress did in June of 1776 so you are entitled.

IV. This section allows you to explain **your group's role in the dispute**. Certainly this is an opportune time to remind the world of your group's virtue and inherent superiority.

V. In your last paragraph describe **what the world will look like with your group free and independent** of their oppressor. Describe how the relationship between the two groups will be different and how your group will be different being free and independent from oppression.

VI. **Signatures**. All members of your group should sign. However, you should include additional signatures of famous individuals, both living and dead, who would have an interest in signing your document. Unfortunately, you will be forced to forge their signatures. For example, if in your declaration you are representing black people declaring independence from racist America, you would want to have the signatures of certain key leaders of the civil rights movement sign your document. Be thoughtful and creative.

VII. One last piece to consider- be creative in your presentation of the document. Although your declaration should be legible and meet the above requirements, there are a number of creative ways to present the project. Have fun with this part.