

History

Year 8 - Lesson 6

# **The Declaration of Independence**

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# Interpreting the Declaration of Independence

This worksheet includes three versions of the Declaration of Independence.

- A modern language version
- An original language version
- A version with hints about Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment ideas

## Task

1. Read through the modern language version to try and understand the document
2. Then try to find two new quotes from the original language version to put in your table
3. If you're struggling to find quotes, read the version with hints



# Modern language version Declaration (1)

We believe the following statements are obvious: that all men are created equal, that they are given rights at birth by God. These rights include rights to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. For these rights to be protected, governments must be organised by men and get their authority from all the people. Whenever a government harms the natural rights of the people it rules over, it is the Right of the People to change or get rid of that government. Whatever new government is created, must be organised so that it can protect the safety and happiness of the people. Cautiousness tells us that long-lasting governments should not be changed for unimportant reasons ....



## Modern language version Declaration (2)

...and from experience we know, that mankind are more likely to suffer under a bad and familiar government than to abolish it. But when a long list of abuses and violations of rights takes place, governments may be attempting to establish absolute despotism. In such a time it is the right and duty of the people to abolish such a government, and to establish new ways to protect their future security. This has been the experience of these Colonies; and now it is necessary to change their old system of government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and taking away of rights. All of these actions show the King of Great Britain is attempting to establish an absolute Tyranny over these States.



# Original language version Declaration (1)

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, --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;...



## Original language version Declaration (2)

... 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, 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.



## Original version with hints: Enlightenment ideas underlined and *conservative ideas in italics* (1)

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, --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;...



## Original language version Declaration (2)

... 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, 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.*





# Reading the Declaration of Independence

## Enlightenment Reading

- Natural rights
- Equality between men
- Consent to be ruled
- Governments chosen by men and not God

## Conservative Reading

- Protection of traditional freedoms
- Protection against tyranny / despotism
- Governments should be stable



# Glossary

**Abolish:** to get rid of something.

**Authority:** someone or something that is in charge.

**Cautiousness:** being careful.

**Despotism:** ruling badly, often with cruelty.

**Tyranny:** ruling badly, often with cruelty.

**Violations:** going against someone's rights.



# Extension Question

**What evidence is there of Enlightenment ideas in the Declaration of Independence?**

Sentence starters:	Key words
<p><i>On the one hand, there is evidence of Enlightenment ideas in the Declaration of Independence. For example we can see the Enlightenment idea that....</i></p> <p><i>A quote to illustrate this point is....</i></p> <p><i>On the other hand, there is evidence of conservative ideas in the Declaration of Independence. For example we can see the conservative idea that....</i></p> <p><i>A quote to illustrate this point is...</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Natural rights</li><li>- Equality</li><li>- Agreements</li><li>- Tradition</li><li>- Protection</li><li>- Tyranny</li><li>- Despotism</li><li>- Stability</li></ul>

