

Declaration Decoder

Mission: The Declaration of Independence is a primary source with two jobs: it explains big IDEAS about government and lists COMPLAINTS against the king. Decode the original words, highlight both kinds of sentences, and translate them into plain English.

Big question: What ideas about government does the Declaration of Independence express, and why did the colonists declare independence?

★ Warm-up: Old words, new words

Translate into kid words.

"endowed by their Creator" ✓ **Born with.**

"pursuit of Happiness" ✓ **Chasing a happy life.**

Key vocabulary

Unalienable	Cannot be taken away.
Consent of the governed	Government gets its power from the people's agreement.
Grievance	A complaint about unfair treatment.
Self-evident	So obvious it needs no proof.
Abolish	To end completely.

1 Box 1

Read the original

In the simulator: Read the excerpts and press ✓ I finished reading.

What did you notice?

Ideas vs. complaints

In the simulator: Highlight the 3 big ideas (■) and the 4 complaints (■).

What did you notice?

2 Box 2

Unalienable rights

Which three unalienable rights are named?

Choose all that apply.

☐ Life ☐ Liberty ☐ The pursuit of Happiness ☐ Owning a horse ☐ Voting

✓ **Life; Liberty; The pursuit of Happiness**

Consent

According to the Declaration, where does government get its power?

☐ From the consent of the governed (the people) ☐ From the king ☐ From the army

✓ **From the consent of the governed (the people)**

3 Box 3

Translate

Translate two sentences into your own words.

"Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Look for: Explains consent; at least 10 words

"For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent"

Look for: Mentions taxes; Explains without consent; at least 8 words

4 Box 4

Connect to history

Which event from 1765 connects to the complaint about taxes without consent?

☐ The Stamp Act ☐ The Treaty of Paris ☐ Yorktown

✓ **The Stamp Act**

5 Box 5

Why declare independence? (RACE)

Why did the colonists believe they had the right to declare independence? Quote the Declaration.

Answer

Look for: Uses the Declaration's idea; at least 14 words

Cite

Look for: an exact quote from the text; at least 10 words

Explain

Look for: Connects to the king's actions; at least 14 words

6 Box 6

Legend: "all men are created equal" Legend only

In 1776, enslaved people, women, and Native Americans did not have equal rights. Quote the Declaration and explain how later Americans used these words to fight for equality.

Look for: Connects to later struggles; an exact quote from the text; at least 30 words



Exit ticket: answer the big question in your own words

What ideas about government does the Declaration of Independence express, and why did the colonists declare independence?

Look for: The Declaration says people have unalienable rights (life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness), that governments get their power from the consent of the governed, and that people can change a government that violates their rights. It lists the king's abuses, like taxes without consent, to justify independence.



Completion codes

Students see a code like **ABC-I3** when they finish. The first part must match below. The letter is the level (E = Explorer, I = Investigator, L = Legend), and the number at the end is how many stars they earned.

Level	Code starts with
 Explorer	UDB-E
 Investigator	1E3-I
 Legend	BKF-L



Watch for these misconceptions

- "The war started with the Declaration of Independence." Fighting began at Lexington and Concord more than a year earlier.
- "All colonists wanted independence." Many were Loyalists or neutral.
- "The colonists won alone." French money, troops, and navy were essential.