

Summary: Declaring Independence

The Steps to Independence

After the battles of 1775, the American colonies and Britain were at war. Some colonists were Patriots. They wanted independence. Others still thought of King George as their king. One famous Patriot, Thomas Paine, wrote a pamphlet called *Common Sense*. He wrote that the king treated the colonists unfairly. He said the only way to stop this was to become independent. He also wrote that the colonists had nothing to gain and much to lose by staying tied to the king. Thousands of people read the pamphlet, and support for independence grew.

Declaration of Independence

Congress asked Thomas Jefferson and others to write a declaration of independence. Jefferson wrote about the rights of all people in the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson wrote that people have the right to live, the right to be free, and the right to seek happiness. He wrote that if a government does not protect these rights, people have the right to form a new government. He wrote that King George had tried to take away rights and force taxes on the colonies. The Declaration said the colonies should separate from Britain and that only free colonies could protect the colonists' rights.

Importance of the Declaration

On July 4, 1776, the Congress accepted the Declaration. The delegates knew it was dangerous to sign it. Britain would say it was treason. But delegates signed. The Declaration is still important because it says the American people believe in equal rights for all. Today we know that the words "all men are created equal" include everyone: women, men, children, and every race and group. But in 1776, people's ideas were different. Only white men who owned property had the right to vote. Laws that recognized equal rights of other groups were passed later.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

independence *noun*, freedom from being ruled by someone else

declaration *noun*, a statement that declares or announces an idea

rights *noun*, freedoms that are protected by a government's laws

treason *noun*, the crime of fighting against one's own government



After You Read

REVIEW What were Thomas Paine's arguments for independence?

Underline the sentences that tell you Paine's ideas.

REVIEW According to the Declaration, why did the colonies have the right to their own government?

Underline the sentences that say why the colonies had a right to their own government.

REVIEW Why is the Declaration so important to Americans? Underline the sentence that says why the Declaration is still important.