

Activity 2



Decoding the Declaration of Independence

In **National Treasure**, Ben Gates gives a salute to the signers of the Declaration of Independence: “Here’s to the men who did what was considered wrong in order to do what they knew was right.” Then he steals the Declaration of Independence from the National Archives! Ben knows it contains clues and that other treasure hunters are after it. But he’s willing to risk his own freedom to keep the Declaration (and the treasure) from harm. Like the signers, Ben does what he knows is right.

PART ONE Secret Messages

Ben discovers a code on the back of the Declaration that helps him uncover a secret message. It’s a code used by real spies in the Revolutionary War. Each word in the message is represented by numbers that identify words in another document. But you need the original document for the code to work. See if you can use this code to uncover a message in the original Declaration of Independence (on page 7). The numbers identify words by line number and word number. Find the right line, then count the words to find the right word.

- | | |
|---------|----------|
| 1. 3-6 | 5. 8-4 |
| 2. 6-4 | 6. 10-22 |
| 3. 7-11 | 7. 12-23 |
| 4. 7-20 | |

Write the secret message here:

Now use this code to make up your own secret messages.

PART TWO Evolving Languages

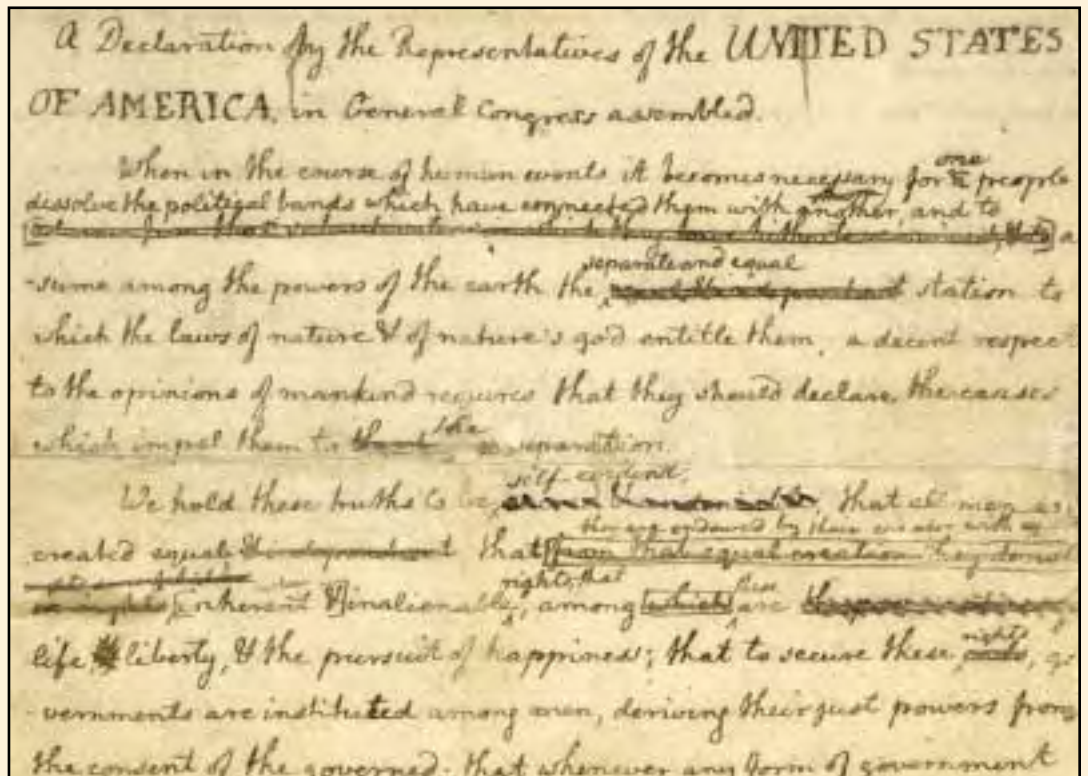
Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. You can see part of his rough draft below and at the Library of Congress website (www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trt001.html). After Jefferson wrote the Declaration, John Adams and Ben Franklin changed some of the wording. Then more words were changed before the Continental Congress voted to approve the document. Compare Jefferson’s wording with the final version of the Declaration in the passages below. Would you vote for the changes? Why or why not?

Jefferson

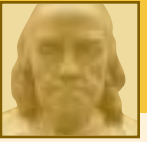
- “to advance from that subordination in which they have hitherto remained....”
- “we hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable...”
- “that from that equal creation they derive in rights inherent and inalienable...”

Final Version

What if we were revising the Declaration of Independence today? How would you reword it? Underline some parts that are hard to understand. Then paraphrase or rewrite those passages so that they are much simpler and clearer for readers today.



Jefferson’s Rough Draft of the Declaration of Independence



The Declaration of Independence (original engraving)

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

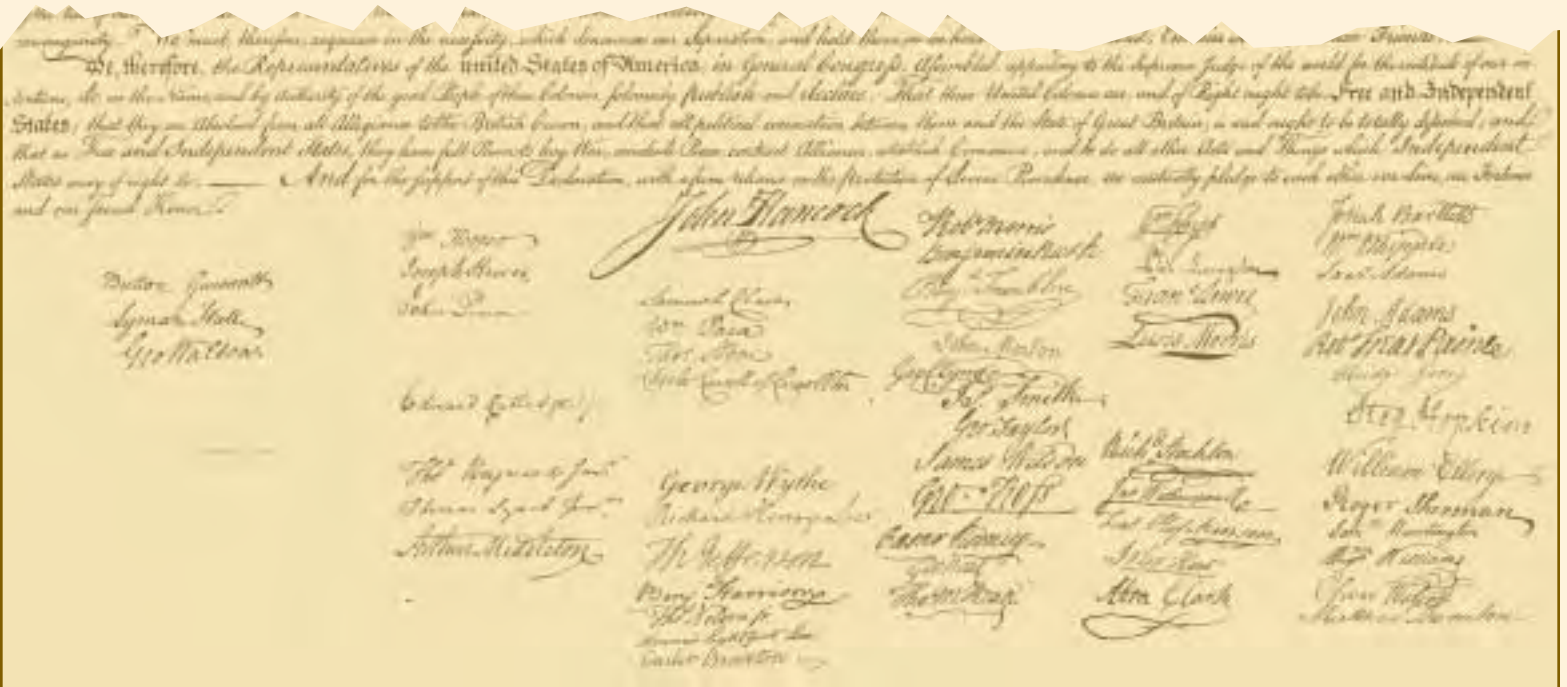
The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

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. 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; and accordingly all experienced Men have hitherto been unwilling to alter them, 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 Duty, 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 System of Government. The History of the present King of Great Britain is a History of repeated Injuries and Oppressions, all having in direct and plain Proposition an evident Tendency to the same. In the most distant and remote Parts of this vast Continent, the People have been subjected to a cruel and insupportable Burden of Taxes, without their Consent, and without their Representation. He has refused to assent to Laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public Good. He has refused to pass Acts of great Importance, unless the Money therein contained be raised by a virtual Power of Taxation. He has refused to pass Acts of great Importance, unless the Money therein contained be raised by a virtual Power of Taxation. He has refused to pass Acts of great Importance, unless the Money therein contained be raised by a virtual Power of Taxation.

PART THREE Sign Here

On July 4, 1776, the Declaration was considered final. Forty-two signers were present to place their signatures on the document. Later, fourteen others squeezed their names onto the bottom. As you can see, there's still room for more signatures.

Add your name to this list of liberty's champions. Then visit the **National Archives** website to find out more about some of the original signers: www.archives.gov/national_archives_experience/charters/declaration_join_the_signers.html.



YOUR CLUE to the TREASURE

Now use your code-cracking skills to uncover a secret message in the games section of the National Treasure website. You could be on your way to collecting real digital treasure. Visit www.NationalTreasure.com.

Answers: Part One—Secret Messages. Human rights form the foundation of government. 1. "It becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another..." 2. "we hold these truths to be self-evident..." 3. "they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights..."