

Declaration of Independence

¹ Almost everyone has heard of the Declaration of Independence. It is a very important piece of paper. Many people go to see it every year. Thomas Jefferson wrote most of it. He was a very quiet man. His friends knew he was a great writer. They knew his writing was clear. He would be able to tell England how the colonists felt.

² He finished it in late June of 1776. It was read to the Continental Congress. They changed some of the document. On July 4, 1776, it was accepted. Most people don't know that only two people signed it on July 4th. Almost everyone else signed it on different days. The last person didn't sign it until almost five years later.

³ The first person to sign the Declaration of Independence was John Hancock. He wrote his name very large. He wanted to be sure the King of England would be sure to see it.

⁴ Copies of the Declaration of Independence were sent to the colonies. Many patriots were very excited. There were parties to celebrate. In New York, the patriots tore down statues of the king. People shot cannons for hours in Boston.

⁵ The Declaration of Independence has three main parts. The beginning is called a preamble. The first part talks about "unalienable" rights. These are rights that people are born with and cannot be taken away. Jefferson wrote that all people deserve the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." He also wrote that "all men are created equal." At the time the Declaration of Independence was written, colonists in America felt that their rights were being trampled and taken away by the government in England. They hoped that the Declaration of Independence would help to give them the freedom they wanted.

⁶ The first part also says that people have a government to protect their rights. If the government does not do that, the people should get rid of the government and form a new government. This would help people to protect themselves.

⁷ The second part is a list of complaints against the King and tells about the things that Britain had done wrong. Jefferson told the king that people did not like the soldiers in the colonies. He complained about all the taxes. These included the taxes on tea and sugar. Jefferson wrote about all these things to show the king that the colonists had the right to fight back. He said that the colonists had tried to talk to the king about these things and he had not listened.



⁸ The last part of the Declaration of Independence tells Britain that the colonies were now thirteen separate, independent states. Great Britain no longer controlled them. The United States was free. It also said that the United States could trade or deal with any country it wanted to.

⁹ King George III did not like the Declaration of Independence. He did not agree with what it said. He sent ships and soldiers to America to crush the rebellion. The war had officially started.

¹⁰ Today, the Declaration of Independence is in Washington, D.C. It is very faded. People did not take good care of it during the 1800's. Today, guards watch it during the day. It is housed in special cases. These cases protect it from light and temperature change. At night, it is housed in a special vault. People want to make sure it lasts a long time.
