

Declaration of Independence

By Cathy Pearl

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.

He finished it in late June of 1776. It was read to the Continental Congress. They changed it very little. 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 August 2nd. The last person didn't sign it until almost five years later.

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.

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 a statue of the king. People shot cannons for hours in Boston.

The Declaration of Independence has a beginning and three main parts. The beginning is called a preamble. The first part talks about natural rights. These are rights that people are born with. Jefferson wrote "that all men are created equal." At the time the Declaration of Independence was written, this was not true. African Americans were still being owned as slaves. They hoped that the Declaration of Independence would help to free them.

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. This would help people to protect themselves.

The second part 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.

The last part of the Declaration of Independence tells Britain that the colonies are now the United States of America. Britain had no control over them any longer. The United States was a free country. It also said that the United States could trade and deal with any country that it wanted to.

The king did not like the Declaration of Independence. He did not agree with what it said. He sent ships to the United States. The war had officially started.

Today the Declaration of Independence is in Washington, D.C. It is very faded. People did not take good care of it during the 1800s. 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.



Name _____

Date _____

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Questions

- _____ 1. What is the beginning of the Declaration of Independence called?
A. It does not have a name.
B. Preamble
C. Conclusion
- _____ 2. Who was the first person to sign the Declaration of Independence?
A. John Hancock
B. Thomas Jefferson
C. George Washington
- _____ 3. How many people signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4th?
A. Six
B. Two
C. Three
- _____ 4. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?
A. Thomas Jefferson
B. George Washington
C. John Hancock

5. How did colonists feel about the Declaration of Independence?

6. How did the king feel about the Declaration of Independence?

In your own words, Tell why the colonists should be free from England. Support your answer using details from the article.
