

# Primary and Secondary Sources Activity

The logo for 'networks' features the word in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. A stylized graphic of intersecting lines forms a starburst or network pattern behind the letter 'o'.

## The Enlightenment and Revolutions

### The Declaration of Independence, 1776

#### Background

The early founders of the United States were familiar with the ideas of the Enlightenment. The Declaration of Independence reflects some of the ideas about government found in the writings of Enlightenment thinkers and, in particular, philosopher John Locke. He believed that it is the government's responsibility to protect the natural rights of the governed. He also supported the idea that those who governed have a contract with the people being governed and if the governed do not like what the government does they have the right to overthrow it. Remember, too, that U.S. founders were Englishmen and familiar with the ideas of the English Bill of Rights, which guaranteed that Englishmen had the right to petition the monarch over grievances. Also, the monarch could not impose taxes without the consent of the people or interfere with the workings of the legislature. The Declaration of Independence not only inspired revolutions in other parts of the world but also allowed long-time foes of Britain—including France—to fight alongside the new country of the United States.

**Directions:** Read the selections. Then answer the questions that follow.

. . . 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, . . . when a long train of abuses . . . evinces [reveals] a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism [absolute control by government], it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. . . . such is now the necessity which constrains [compels] them to alter their former Systems of Government.

—from The Declaration of Independence, 1776

# Primary and Secondary Sources

## Activity *Cont.*



### The Enlightenment and Revolutions

The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations . . . To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world: He has refused his Assent [approval] to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good . . . He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing . . . his invasions on the rights of the people. . . . He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers. He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries. . . . He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures. . . . For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent: For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury: . . . For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments: For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

—from The Declaration of Independence, 1776

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress [remedies] in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. . . .

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude [correctness] of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved [freed] from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved . . .

—from The Declaration of Independence, 1776

- Analyzing Primary Sources** List the natural rights identified in the Declaration of Independence.

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# Primary and Secondary Sources

## Activity *Cont.*



### The Enlightenment and Revolutions

2. **Analyzing Information** Which phrases reflect John Locke’s philosophy?

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3. **Determining Cause and Effect** How does the listing of grievances against the king point to the colonists’ basic understanding about their relationship to the king as British citizens?

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4. **Identifying Central Issues** In the listing of grievances, which issues were likely to be most central to the colonists’ discontent with the king?

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5. **Identifying Perspectives and Differing Interpretations** Assess the reasons the colonists gave for declaring independence in terms of their understanding of proper government.

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6. **Predicting Consequences** Present an argument supporting or rejecting the idea that the American Revolution would not have occurred if the colonies had been held by a European power other than Great Britain.

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