

The Declaration of Independence

Directions: The following paragraphs are from the Declaration of Independence. Read them carefully, and underline words or phrases you think are important. Think about the questions that follow.

Key Excerpts

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.

1. What do you think “unalienable rights” (or “inalienable rights”) means?
2. According to the document where do unalienable rights come from?
3. What is the purpose of government?
4. From where does government get its power?
5. Are the powers given to the government by the people limited or unlimited?
6. When should government be changed?

Critical Analysis Questions

1. As Americans, should we be proud of this document?
2. What does the Declaration tell the world about the United States?
3. Are the ideals expressed in the Declaration outdated, or are they still true today?
4. Do these ideals matter to you? If so, how and why?
5. How could the Continental Congress approve this document when so many of its members owned slaves?
6. Does the fact that many of these men owned slaves mean these ideas are wrong or less important?