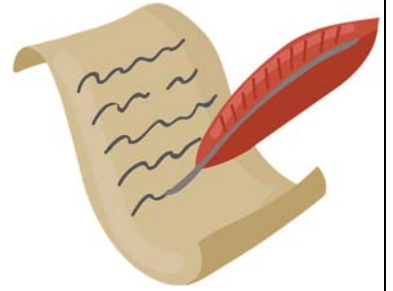


Name \_\_\_\_\_

## The Declaration of Independence - A Bold Gamble



**Read the following passage carefully:**

In July of 1776, representatives from the thirteen American colonies met in Philadelphia and signed one of the most important documents in world history: the **Declaration of Independence**. Written primarily by **Thomas Jefferson**, the document was more than a list of grievances against King George III - it was a powerful statement of political philosophy and a bold announcement to the world.

For years, the colonies had expressed frustration with British rule. Taxation without representation, the quartering of British soldiers, and the shutting down of local governments were only some of the complaints. Previous petitions had gone unanswered. When violence broke out in 1775, most colonists still hoped for reconciliation. But over time, the possibility of peace faded. Revolutionary ideas - influenced by Enlightenment thinkers like **John Locke** - began to spread. Colonists increasingly believed that all people had natural rights, and that governments existed to protect those rights.

The Declaration boldly stated that "**all men are created equal**" and have rights to "**life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.**" It argued that when a government becomes destructive of these rights, the people have the right to alter or abolish it. Jefferson listed over 25 abuses committed by the British crown, including dissolving colonial legislatures, imposing taxes without consent, and waging war against the colonies.

Signing the document was an act of treason in the eyes of the British government. If the revolution failed, its signers could be executed. Still, the Continental Congress believed that independence was necessary - not only for political freedom but also to unite the colonies under a shared identity. The Declaration of Independence gave the Revolution a clear purpose and helped persuade foreign allies, like France, to support the American cause.

The ideas in the Declaration have endured far beyond 1776. It inspired future movements for freedom and equality in America and around the world. While the document did not immediately apply to everyone - including women, enslaved people, and Native Americans - its ideals continue to shape debates about liberty and justice to this day.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## The Declaration of Independence - A Bold Gamble

Answer the following questions:

1. According to the passage, what were two reasons the colonists felt justified in declaring independence?
2. How did Enlightenment philosophy influence the Declaration of Independence? Use examples from the text.
3. What risks did the signers of the Declaration face, and why did they proceed anyway?
4. What does the phrase “all men are created equal” mean in the historical context of the Declaration? How might this phrase be viewed critically today? *(Answer in 2–3 sentences.)*
5. Choose one quote from the passage. Explain how it supports the central idea of the text.
6. The author writes, “The Declaration of Independence gave the Revolution a clear purpose.” What does this mean? Do you agree? Explain with evidence from the passage.