From Draft to Declaration

Read how an argument for independence became Congress's statement.

8.C.1.5.A "Read and discuss the Declaration of Independence as drafted by Thomas Jefferson, influenced by the Committee of Five, and adopted July 4, 1776."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number three actions that took the Declaration from Jefferson's draft to Congress's adoption, underline one claim about government's power, and circle one quoted complaint against the king.

Making the Case for Independence

1. In June 1776, the Second Continental Congress asked five delegates to prepare a statement explaining why the thirteen colonies should separate from Britain. The group included Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston. Jefferson wrote the first full draft. Rather than simply announce a break, he built an argument: a government should protect people's rights, and people may change a government that repeatedly fails them. His words had to persuade readers in the colonies and abroad that independence was justified.

2. In the draft that became the Declaration, Jefferson wrote that "all men are created equal" and named "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" among their rights. Governments, the text says, get their "just powers from the consent of the governed." It then charges King George III with abuses, including "For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent." The complaint gives a concrete example of power used without the colonists' approval. Together, the principle and the complaint support the claim that the colonies had reason to form independent states.

3. The other members of the Committee of Five reviewed Jefferson's draft; Adams and Franklin suggested changes. Congress then debated and revised the text, removing some words before adopting the Declaration on July 4, 1776. Delegates had voted for independence on July 2, but the July 4 document publicly explained that decision. Its phrase "all men are created equal" stated a broad ideal, yet women, enslaved people, and Indigenous peoples did not share equal rights in 1776. The adopted text spoke for Congress, not only for Jefferson.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the Declaration's ideas about rights and consent support changing a government?

2. How does the complaint about taxes help the Declaration's argument rather than just report an event?

3. Why is it inaccurate to call the adopted Declaration only Jefferson's personal statement?

4. Why do July 2 and July 4 mark different steps in the case for independence?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence exhibit caption explaining why the Declaration was both a persuasive argument and a limited promise in 1776. Use one quoted principle, a specific complaint, the revision or adoption process, and one group that did not share equal rights.

ANSWER KEY

From Draft to Declaration

GRADE 8 · 8.C.1.5.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number three actions that took the Declaration from Jefferson's draft to Congress's adoption, underline one claim about government's power, and circle one quoted complaint against the king. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the Declaration's ideas about rights and consent support changing a government?	**A government should protect people's rights and get its power from their consent. If it repeatedly fails to do so, people may change it.**
2	How does the complaint about taxes help the Declaration's argument rather than just report an event?	**It gives a specific example of the king using power without the colonists' consent, supporting the claim that independence was justified.**
3	Why is it inaccurate to call the adopted Declaration only Jefferson's personal statement?	**Jefferson drafted it, but the Committee of Five reviewed it and Congress revised and adopted it.**
4	Why do July 2 and July 4 mark different steps in the case for independence?	**Delegates voted for independence on July 2. On July 4, Congress adopted the document that publicly explained the decision.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Declaration says governments get their "just powers from the consent of the governed," giving readers a rule for judging the king. Its complaint about taxes imposed without colonial consent offered evidence that he broke that rule. Jefferson drafted the text, but the committee reviewed it and Congress revised and adopted it as its public case. The promise of equality was limited in 1776 because enslaved people did not have equal rights.

Accept captions that accurately connect a quoted principle to a complaint and identify Congress's role and a gap between the Declaration's ideals and rights in 1776.