

**The Two Sides of the Declaration of Independence**  
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**Document Based Question, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade and above**

**Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents (A-F). Some of these documents have been edited for the purposes of these exercises. This question is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the sources of the document and the author's point of view.

**Question: Discuss the various attitudes, actions, and grievances leading to a Declaration of Independence from the colonists to Great Britain's crown. Give response to both perspectives (the colonists and the king).**

**Document A**

George Mason was a colonist whose views about the relationship between Great Britain and the colonies changed as his beliefs about individual rights and liberties evolved. This patriot argued tirelessly to preserve the rights of individuals and to ensure that government would not encroach [infringe] on those rights.

[www.gunstonhall.org/georgemason/quotes.html](http://www.gunstonhall.org/georgemason/quotes.html)

Source: George Mason's letter to Richard Henry Lee  
December 6, 1770

*"We have always acknowledged we are always ready to recognize the sovereignty of Great Britain but we will not submit to have our own money taken out of our pockets without our consent; because if any man or any set of men take from us without our consent or that of our representatives one shilling in the pound we have not security for the remaining nineteen. We owe to our Mother-Country the duty of subjects but will not pay her the submission of slaves."*

George Mason

1. What country is George Mason accusing of taking money without consent from the colonists?
2. While George Mason is willing to recognize the sovereignty of Great Britain what is he not willing to do?
3. According to this quote, what are the types of currency the colonists used?

**Document B**

Parliament moved quickly to punish Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party and to reassert its authority over the colonies. It passed a series of acts that the colonists called "intolerable." This political cartoon shows colonial protest against the Intolerable Acts. In August of 1774, the Williamsburg Resolutions were passed. Virginians were urged to sign a pledge of loyalty to the Continental Congress and to stop the export of tobacco to England, the colonies' major and most profitable crop, until all taxes on imported goods were repealed.



**Intolerable Acts political cartoon**

4. What document do you think the man is signing?
5. What do you think would happen to this man if he refused to sign this document?

#### **Document C**

The Coercive Acts, known to the colonists as the "Intolerable" Acts were a series of laws passed by British parliament in 1774 in response to the growing unrest in the thirteen American colonies, particularly in Boston, Massachusetts after incidents such as the Boston Tea Party. The Boston Tea Party was the response of angry colonists to the taxing and importing of tea from Great Britain. Colonists seized the ships carrying tea and dumped the cargo overboard in revolt.

Source: The Boston Port Act: (Part of the Intolerable Acts)

*March 31, 1774*

*“AN ACT to discontinue... the landing and discharging, lading or shipping, of goods, wares, and merchandise, at the town, and within the harbour, of Boston, in the province of Massachusetts Bay, in North America.*

*WHEREAS dangerous commotions and insurrections have been fomented and raised in the town of Boston, in the province of Massachusetts Bay, in New England, by divers ill affected persons, to the subversion of his Majesty's government, and to the utter destruction of the publick peace, and good order of the said town; in which commotions and insurrections certain valuable cargoes of teas, being the property of the East India Company, and on board certain' vessels lying within the bay or harbour of Boston, were seized and destroyed... ”*

6. What did this act ban?
  
7. Why was the Boston Port Act passed by British parliament?

#### Document D

The following excerpt is King George III's response to the colonist's acts of rebellion and defiance (i.e. The Boston Tea Party, various boycotts, anti-British propaganda, etc.)

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?documentprint=875>

King George III  
August 23, 1775

*“Whereas many of our subjects in divers parts of our Colonies and Plantations in North America, misled by dangerous and ill designing men, and forgetting the allegiance which they owe to the power that has protected and supported them; after various disorderly acts committed in disturbance of the publick peace, to the obstruction of lawful commerce, and to the oppression of our loyal subjects carrying on the same; have at length proceeded to open and avowed rebellion, by arraying themselves in a hostile manner, to withstand the execution of the law, and traitorously preparing, ordering and levying war against us...*

*... “we have thought fit, by and with the advice of our Privy Council, to issue our Royal Proclamation, hereby declaring, that not only all our Officers, civil and military, are obliged to exert their utmost endeavours to suppress such rebellion, and to bring the traitors to justice, but that all our subjects of this Realm, and the dominions thereunto belonging, are bound by law to be aiding and assisting in the suppression of such rebellion, and to disclose and make known all traitorous conspiracies and attempts against us, our crown and dignity; and we do accordingly strictly charge and command all our Officers, as well civil as military, and all others our obedient and loyal subjects, to use their utmost endeavours to withstand and suppress such rebellion, and to disclose and make known all treasons and traitorous conspiracies which they shall know to be against us, our crown and dignity...”*

8. How did the king view the colonists that rebelled against him?

9. How did the king plan to suppress the rebellion?

**Document E:**

John Trumbull was an American painter, architect, and author, whose paintings of major episodes in the American Revolution form a unique record of that conflict's events and participants. This painting depicts the presentation of the Declaration of Independence to the Continental Congress. The five men in the middle are the committee of men who drafted the document. The committee consisted of Thomas Jefferson (the primary author), Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Robert R. Livingston and Roger Sherman.

<http://www.quiz-tree.com/Declaration-of-Independence-Trumbull.html>



**John Trumbull's "Declaration of Independence"**

10. Who are the five men standing in the middle of the room?

11. Who do you think the other men are in the room?

### Document F

The Declaration of Independence was written by delegates of the Second Continental Congress to proclaim their freedom from Great Britain's rule. The Declaration had three major parts. The first part stated that all people have unalienable rights (rights that cannot be taken away from you). The second part stated the complaints of the colonies against King George and how he had violated the colonists' rights of self-government. The third part argued that the colonists had the right to separate from Great Britain. The following excerpt comes from the portion of the Declaration which states the colonists' complaints against the king.

#### Holt, Rinehart and Winston- Call to Freedom

Source: The Declaration of Independence  
July 4, 1776

*"...The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world..."*

*...He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only...*

*...He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance...*

*...He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures...*

*...He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation: For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:  
For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:  
For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:  
For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent...*

*...We have Petitioned for Redress 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...*

12. What term did the colonists use to describe the king?

13. Summarize the grievances (complaints) the colonists had with the king.

**Now go back to page 1 and write an essay, answering the question in the box. Remember to use information from the document, the questions, and your own knowledge to write your essay.**