

# Summary: Declaration of Independence

## Declaration of Independence

Congress asked Thomas Jefferson and others to write a declaration of independence. They needed a document to declare why the colonies had to become independent of Britain. In this document, Jefferson wrote what many Americans believed about their rights. Jefferson wrote that people have the right to live, the right to be free, and the right to seek happiness. The Declaration explains why the colonies should break away from Britain. It says that people have rights that cannot be taken away, lists the complaints against the king, and argues that the colonies have to be free to protect the colonists' rights. At the bottom of the document, the delegates signed their names.

## Importance of the Declaration

Jefferson wrote that if a government does not protect the rights of citizens, people have the right to form a new government. This idea was not new. Jefferson used ideas that John Locke and other English thinkers had written about. Jefferson listed many ways that Britain had not served the colonists. He wrote, for example, that King George had tried to take away rights and force taxes on the colonies. Jefferson showed that the colonists had a right to separate from the king and have their own government.

The Declaration of Independence was approved on July 4, 1776. The Declaration is still important because it says the American people believe in equal rights for all. Today we know that the words "all men are created equal" include everyone: women, men, children, and every race, group, and ability. But in 1776, people's ideas were different. Only white men who owned property had the right to vote. Laws that recognized equal rights of other groups were passed later.



### Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

**declaration** *noun*, a statement that declares, or announces, an idea

**independence** *noun*, freedom from being ruled by someone else

**rights** *noun*, freedoms that are protected by a government's laws



### After You Read

**REVIEW** According to the Declaration, why did the colonies have the right to their own government?

Circle the sentence that tells about how the Declaration explains why the colonists should have rights and be independent of Britain.

**REVIEW** Why is the Declaration so important to Americans? Highlight the sentence that says why the Declaration is still important.