

Making a Case

Examine the following excerpts from the Declaration of Independence. Use them to answer the accompanying questions.

...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 made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries...

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

Circle the word(s) in the excerpt above that show evidence of King George III being blamed for the colonists' problems. What are some things he is being accused of?

...In every stage of these Oppressions 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...

Is the above excerpt saying that all monarchies are bad, or that King George III specifically has failed as a ruler? Which would a monarch from a nation thinking about supporting the United States prefer? Why?

...That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do...

What does the above excerpt say has changed about the relationship between Great Britain and the American colonies? Circle the power that the colonies say they now have that they could use to gain assistance from another nation.

Would Britain's rivals, such as France and Spain, prefer that the colonies remain part of Great Britain or that it break away into a new nation? What might they be willing to do to make sure this happens?

Place a star next to the grievances in the excerpts below that affected colonists in more than one colony. Write the name(s) of the affected colonies beneath the grievance or write ALL if you think all the colonies were affected. Use the Timeline of Protest and Independence to assist you.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people...

...For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us...

...For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world...

...For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent...

...For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government...

...For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments...

...He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us...

...He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people...

How might colonists have felt when they read these grievances and were reminded that they had experiences similar to colonists elsewhere in North America? Do you think they would be more or less likely to get along with each other after learning about this?

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...He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries...

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

Circle the word(s) in the excerpt above that show evidence of King George III being blamed for the colonists' problems. What are some things he is being accused of?

Students should note that the phrase "the present King of Great Britain" and references to what "He has" done are evidence that King George III is being blamed for the colonists' problems.

He is being blamed for creating a tyranny, having colonists' cases tried in courts that he controls, and sending occupying armies to the colonies in places like Boston.

...In every stage of these Oppressions 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...

Is the above excerpt saying that all monarchies are bad, or that King George III specifically has failed as a ruler? Which would a monarch from a nation thinking about supporting the United States prefer? Why?

This excerpt is saying that King George III has failed as a ruler by citing that colonists have attempted to communicate and reason with him and he has only continued to make things worse by answering their petitions with "repeated injury". The excerpt says that "A Prince" who is a tyrant is "unfit to be the ruler of a free people", but does not say that All Princes are unfit.

...That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do...

What does the above excerpt say has changed about the relationship between Great Britain and the American colonies? Circle the power that the colonies say they now have that they could use to gain assistance from another nation.

The excerpt notes that the “United colonies are free and independent states” and “they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown”. Students should identify that the colonies are claiming they are now an independent power. Students should circle the portion of the excerpt where they assert that they can “contract alliances” (with other nations) as a way of showing that they can gain assistance from them.

Would Britain’s rivals, such as France and Spain, prefer that the colonies remain part of Great Britain or that it break away into a new nation? What might they be willing to do to make sure this happens?

Students should note that, as rivals of Great Britain, France and Spain would prefer that Britain was weakened by having the American colonies permanently separate from it. Answers may vary again as to what France and Spain may be willing to do to ensure this, but students should note that they may be willing to ally themselves with the United States to fight against Great Britain and ensure this happens.

Place a star next to the grievances in the excerpts below that affected colonists in more than one colony. Write the name(s) of the affected colonies beneath the grievance or write ALL if you think all the colonies were affected. Use the Timeline of Protest and Independence to assist you.

Student answers in this section may vary. Challenge them to cite events from the Timeline of Protest and Independence or other resources to support their answers.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people...

...For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us...

...For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world...

...For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent...

...For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government...

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...He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us...

...He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people...

How might colonists have felt when they read these grievances and were reminded that they had experiences similar to colonists elsewhere in North America? Do you think they would be more or less likely to get along with each other after learning about this?

Answers may vary. Students should note that some colonists may have had empathy for other colonists who had experiences similar to their own during the era of protest before independence. Students should note that this empathy might make them more likely to get along. Students might also note that it could have the opposite effect on Loyalists who disputed the grievances in the Declaration or the premise of independence.