

Name _____

Date _____

The Declaration

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. The Second Continental Congress selected Thomas Jefferson to draft the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson was a statesman from Virginia who was known as an idealist and a good writer. Jefferson locked himself in a room for a few days, writing on a special desk he had designed. His draft stated forcefully that governments don't grant rights; people are born, or endowed, with unalienable rights that they are entitled to, and the government should protect those rights. Those rights include life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Furthermore, the government gets its power and legitimacy from the will of the people, not from God, tradition or military power. These ideas come directly from the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was a philosophical movement with origins in Europe in the seventeenth century. Thinkers like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau proposed the revolutionary ideas that men were born with rights and that governments rested on the will of the people. Jefferson was heavily inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment.

Which of these is most likely true of Thomas Jefferson?

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| A. Thomas Jefferson was not familiar with any Enlightenment thinkers. | B. Thomas Jefferson did not agree with John Locke about the role of the government. |
| C. Thomas Jefferson read the works of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. | D. Thomas Jefferson's ideas would later influence John Locke. |
2. The Declaration states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." The United States is the first government in the world to be founded on this amazing idea. Of course, it didn't seem to apply to the 500,000 enslaved people in America, to women or to Native Americans, all of whom still struggled for equal rights for years after the Declaration was written. Still, it represented a leap forward in political and moral thought.

The Declaration granted equal rights to which of the following groups?

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| A. White men | B. White men and women |
| C. Native American men | D. Enslaved people |

3. What else does the Declaration declare? It states that sometimes, "it's necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another," which was Jefferson's polite way of saying that America was done with King George. The Declaration goes on to list "grievances" (all the things King George had done wrong) that impelled, or forced, them to declare their independence from England. It accuses King George of "cutting off [our] trade" and "imposing taxes on us without our consent." In all, it lists 27 things that King George did wrong. The Declaration ends by actually naming the new country: "We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America...solemnly publish and declare, 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."

Which of the following does the Declaration declare?

- A. that the United States had already been free and independent for ten years
- B. that King George was not at fault for the United States becoming independent
- C. that King George's various wrongdoings left the United States no choice but to become independent
- D. that the United States would declare themselves independent unless King George changed his unfair tax and trade policies within 27 days

4. Though a slaveholder himself, Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence blamed King George for the slave trade, which Jefferson called "execrable commerce." Execrable means extremely bad. The delegates quickly deleted this passage, not only because most of them supported slavery, but also because blaming the slave trade on King George was totally false. Why Jefferson would criticize a system he supported (and that supported him) is unclear. It's typically written off as simple hypocrisy.

How did delegates change Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration?

- A. They added a passage freeing slaves.
- B. They deleted all passages that criticized King George.
- C. They deleted a passage that blamed King George for the slave trade.
- D. They added the phrase "execrable commerce" to a passage about the slave trade.