Appendix C: Pre-reading Guide to the Declaration of Independence

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Declaration of Independence Pre-read Prediction Think-Pair-Share Questions | | |
| Questions | Why did you say this? | How confident are you? (Circle one.) |
| 1. Who do you think wrote the Declaration of Independence? |  | *I am sure*  *Not sure* |
|  |
| 2. Why do you think the Declaration of Independence was written? |  | *I am sure*  *Not sure* |
|  |
| 3. When do you think the Declaration of Independence was written? |  | *I am sure*  *Not sure* |
|  |
| 4. What do you think the Declaration of Independence was about? |  | *I am sure*  *Not sure* |
|  |
| 5. To whom might the Declaration of Independence have been written? |  | *I am sure*  *Not sure* |
|  |

Appendix D: Declaration of Independence Close-Reading  
Guides and Other Teacher Material

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Close-Reading Guide for the Declaration of Independence—Part 1: Preamble | List the Main Idea |
| **Sentence 1:** When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. |  |
| **Explanation:** This first sentence says that if you are going to change your government you have to say why. |
| **Sentence 2:** We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. |  |
| **Explanation:** This sentence describes the first big philosophical idea—**natural rights**. Natural rights mean that “all men are created equal.” Natural rights are “inalienable,” which means they cannot be taken away. Those rights include “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” |
| **Sentences 3 and 4:** That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. |  |
| **Explanation:** These sentences describe the second big philosophical idea—**natural sovereignty.** Natural sovereignty means governments get power from citizens. When governments do not protect people, it is “the right of the people” to change governments. |
| **Sentence 5:** Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. |  |
| **Explanation:** This sentence explains that people should use “prudence” or caution when changing governments. It also states that some “evils are sufferable,” which means people may put up with some mistakes by their government. |
| **Sentence 6:** But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. |  |
| **Explanation**: This sentence explains that sometimes government gets so bad that it has to be changed. |
| **Sentence 7:** Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government. |  |
| **Explanation**: This sentence explains that the colonists have put up with a lot. It also says that they are being forced to change their government. The word “constrains” means forced in this sentence. |
| **Sentences 8 and 9:** 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. |  |
| **Explanation:** These last two sentences introduce the next section of the Declaration of Independence, which is about the things the king did wrong. “Absolute tyranny” means the king wanted total control. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Sentences from the Declaration of Independence** | **Teachers’ Notes** |
| **Sentence 1:** When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. | This sentence is recognizable to many and serves as an introduction to the important ideas that follow. The sentence contains several concepts that teachers may wish to explain, including political bands, separate and equal station, and Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God. |
| **Sentence 2:** We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. | Teachers may want to explain the phrases “all men are created equal” and “inalienable rights.” Teachers may also introduce the idea that the rights listed in this sentence did not apply to everyone in 1776, including women and African Americans. |
| **Sentences 3 and 4:** That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. | These sentences are about the first big philosophical idea—natural rights. Teachers may review the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers, such as John Locke, and how they influenced the authors of the Declaration of Independence. |
| **Sentence 5:** Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. | Teachers may want to pause and ask students to brainstorm specific parameters or rules for when a group can call for independence. It might also be helpful to ask students why the authors included this sentence. |
| **Sentence 6:** But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. | This sentence is about the second big philosophical idea—national sovereignty. Teachers may want to highlight the influence of John Locke and Enlightenment ideas on this sentence, too. |
| **Sentences 7–9:** Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government. 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. | Teachers may want to explain the term “absolute tyranny.” |

Notes for Teachers on the Preamble

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Close-Reading Guide for the Declaration of Independence—Part 2: Grievances | | |
| Grievances in the Declaration of Independence | Helpful Hints | Write the Grievance in Your Own Words |
| 1. He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. | “Assent to laws” means the king gave his permission. |  |
| 1. He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. | Governor may mean any lawmakers.  “His Assent should be obtained” means until his permission is granted. |  |
| 1. 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. | “Relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature” refers to colonists giving up representation in Parliament—Britain’s law-making body of government. “Inestimable” means priceless. “Formidable” means something to be afraid of. |  |
| 1. He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. | “Legislative bodies” are places where laws are made.  “Fatiguing” is to tire out.  “Compliance” means obedience. “Measures” refer to laws. |  |
| 1. He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. | “Dissolved Representative Houses” means the king canceled meetings of colonial lawmakers. |  |
| 1. He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within. | “After such dissolution, to cause others to be elected” means the king was not allowing elections to occur. |  |
| 1. He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. | “Endeavoured” means attempted. “Obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners” means the king was preventing people from moving into Native American territories. |  |
| 1. He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers. | “Obstructed the Administration of Justice” likely refers to the king breaking laws. “Judiciary powers” refer to the powers of judges in the court system. |  |
| 1. He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries. | “Tenure of their offices” refers to the length of time a judge would be in power. |  |
| 1. He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance. | “A multitude of New Offices” were created to help enforce many of the acts Great Britain passed that angered the colonists. |  |
| 1. He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures. | “Consent of our legislatures” refers to the approval of the colonial lawmakers and/or leaders. |  |
| 1. He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power. | “Render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power” refers to the king making the military stronger than the people and not allowing the people any check over it. |  |
| 1. 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: | “Jurisdiction foreign to our constitution” refers to illegal laws.  The use of the term “pretended” is sarcastic in this case. |  |
| 1. For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us: | “Quartering” refers to the practice of forcing people to provide housing for soldiers. |  |
| 1. For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States: | “Them” refers to British troops being automatically found innocent whenever they committed crimes against colonists because they were tried in Great Britain. |  |
| 1. For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world: | Many colonists were forced to buy and/or trade for British goods only. The port of Boston was closed as punishment for the Boston Tea Party. |  |
| 1. For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent: | “Without our Consent” means without permission. |  |
| 1. For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury: | “Depriving” means to take away.  A “Trial by Jury” is a trial in which one’s peers will determine guilt in a court case. |  |
| 1. For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences | Some colonists had to travel thousands of miles to be tried in British courts on false charges. |  |
| 1. For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies: | The “neighbouring Province” refers to the American colonies.  “Arbitrary government” means a government without support of the people.  “Absolute rule” means total control. |  |
| 1. For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments: | This refers to Great Britain getting rid of charters, laws, and local governments and replacing them with ones that limited colonial rule. |  |
| 1. For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. | “Suspending our own Legislatures” means to cancel the colonists’ law-making meetings. |  |
| 1. He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us. | “He has abdicated Government here” refers to King George III removing local and state governments. |  |
| 1. He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people. | The word “plunder” means to steal. “Ravage” means to damage. |  |
| 1. He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation. | The term “foreign Mercenaries” means soldiers hired to fight on behalf of another country. |  |
| 1. He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands. | “Constrained” means to force. The king forced colonists to serve in the British navy. |  |
| 1. He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions. | “Domestic insurrections” refer to conflicts between colonists and Native Americans that the British were encouraging. |  |