

Documents: Declaration of Rights

Name: _____

Time: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Analyze the document and answer the questions.

Background: After Parliament passed the Coercive Acts (Intolerable Acts) to punish Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party, representatives of twelve colonies met in Philadelphia for the First Continental Congress in early September 1774. The colonies were beginning to unify against Britain's growing interest in controlling the colonial governments that, in turn, meant reducing colonial rights and liberties. The Congress drafted a declaration stating their position on political matters in hopes of changing British policy in America.

Declaration and Resolves of the First Continental Congress

October 14, 1774

[T]he inhabitants of the English colonies in North-America, by the immutable laws of nature, the principles of the English constitution, and the several charters or compacts, have the following RIGHTS:

Resolved, N.C.D. 1. That they are entitled to life, liberty and property: and they have never ceded to any foreign power whatever, a right to dispose of either without their consent.

Resolved, N.C.D. 2. That our ancestors, who first settled these colonies, were at the time of their emigration from the mother country, entitled to all the rights, liberties, and immunities of free and natural-born subjects, within the realm of England. . . .

Resolved, 4. That the foundation of English liberty, and of all free government, is a right in the people to participate in their legislative council: and as the English colonists are not represented, and from their

local and other circumstances, cannot properly be represented in the British parliament, they are entitled to a free and exclusive power of legislation in their several provincial legislatures, where their right of representation can alone be preserved. . . .

Resolved, N.C.D. That the following acts of parliament are infringements and violations of the rights of the colonists; and that the repeal of them is essentially necessary, in order to restore harmony between Great Britain and the American colonies, viz. [as follows]

The several acts of Geo. III. . . . which impose duties for the purpose of raising a revenue in America, extend the power of the admiralty courts beyond their ancient limits, deprive the American subject of trial by jury . . . are subversive of American rights.

To these grievous acts and measures, Americans cannot submit, but in hopes their fellow subjects in Great Britain will, on a revision of them, restore us to that state, in which both countries found happiness and prosperity. . . .

Central Ideas. A central idea is the overall topic of the entire piece. Main ideas are important topics that support the central idea.

1. What is the central idea of the Declaration and Resolves?
 - E. King George III is depriving colonists of a right to a jury trial.
 - H. Colonial rights are being violated.
 - O. Colonists are entitled to life, liberty, and property.
 - Y. English colonists have no representation in Parliament.
2. What is the main idea of paragraph 4: Resolved, 4?
 - E. The colonists are entitled to life, liberty, and property.
 - H. The foundation of all free government is the right to a jury trial.
 - O. Colonists should have representation in Parliament.
 - Y. Colonists should have their own legislatures to represent them.

Words in Context. Define words based upon how they are used in the writing.

“That the foundation of English liberty, and of all free government, is a right in the people to participate in their legislative council....”

3. What does the word “legislative” mean as it is used in the quote above?
- D. ruling over a people
 - I. enforcing court judgments
 - R. the ability to make laws
 - W people who work for monarchs or kings

“ That the following acts of parliament are infringements and violations of the rights of the colonists....”

4. What does the word “infringements” mean as it is used in the quote above?
- D. to be beneficial
 - I. to reduce or do away with
 - R. in addition to
 - W legal codes

Facts vs. Opinions.

Fact: A conclusion that can be proven true and/or is absolutely accurate to all people involved.

Opinion: Belief or preference about something that cannot be proven or accepted by all people.

The colonies believe they can only be represented in their own legislatures. Britain believes that Parliament represents everyone in the British Empire.

5. Are the viewpoints of each side based on facts or opinions?
- A. fact
 - N. opinion

Textual Evidence. Find evidence from the document to answer the question below. Circle all answers that apply.

6. What is Britain doing that is violating colonial rights?
- E. Britain is denying colonists the right to a trial by jury.
 - H. Britain refuses to repeal the Tea Act.
 - O. The Colonists are entitled to life, liberty, and property.
 - Y. Britain is taxing the colonies for the purpose of making money.