

Analyzing the Declaration of Independence

1.1 Welcome



Notes:

Welcome to “Analyzing the Declaration of Independence,” an online Civics tutorial for students in seventh grade.

1.2 Objective



Objectives

- Analyze the ideas & structure of the Declaration of Independence
- Learn about Enlightenment ideas:
 - Natural rights
 - Social contract
- Understand complaints against the British
- Recognize and understand famous words, phrases from the Declaration



Notes:

By the end of this tutorial, you'll be able to analyze the ideas and structure of the Declaration of Independence, one of the most famous documents in the history of the United States.

You'll learn how Enlightenment ideas like natural rights and the social contract are an important part of the document.

You'll understand the complaints set forth by Americans colonists against the British.

And you'll recognize famous words and phrases from the Declaration of Independence and understand what they mean.

We have a lot to learn, so let's begin!

1.3 Facts About the Declaration of Independence



Notes:

Let's start by reviewing some important background information that you might already know.

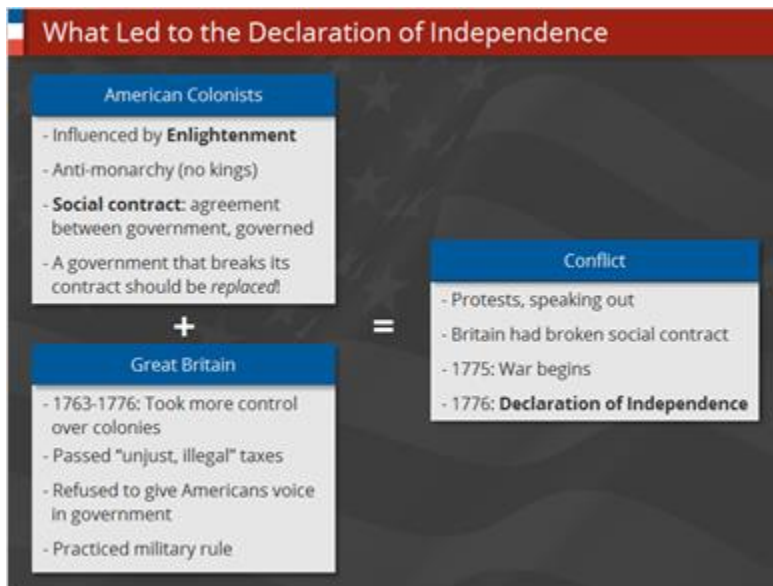
The Declaration of Independence is an announcement to the world that the United States of America was a new nation, separate from the British Empire. Up until this point, the 13 original states had merely been colonies controlled by Great Britain.

The Declaration was written and adopted in 1776, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The date that it was signed and ratified, July 4th, is known as Independence Day. It's America's "birthday."

Although it was the work of a committee, one man is usually recognized as the Declaration's primary author: Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson wrote the first draft of the Declaration of Independence and is responsible for many of its famous phrases and language.

1.4 What Led to the Declaration of Independence



Notes:

Why did Americans feel the need to declare their independence? Let's briefly review.

Thomas Jefferson and the others who wrote the Declaration were American colonists influenced by the new philosophies of the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers disagreed with the old system of monarchy - rule by a king - and promoted a new idea known as the "Social Contract." This is the belief that an agreement exists between government and the people who are governed. If the government breaks that contract, the people have the right to establish a new, better government in its place.

By 1776, Americans felt that the government of Great Britain, including its king, had broken that contract. For more than 10 years, the British had taken more and more control over their American colonies. They passed taxes that colonists considered unjust and illegal. They refused to give Americans a voice in the government process. And they practiced harsh military rule in places like Massachusetts.

At first, colonists tried protesting and speaking out for their rights. They believed that the British government had broken the social contract and lost its right to govern them. Then the conflict turned bloody: war between British and American soldiers began in 1775. A year later, Jefferson and other colonial leaders voted to declare independence.

1.5 Practice

The image shows a digital practice interface. At the top, a red banner contains the word "Practice" in white. Below this, a dark grey background contains the instruction "Click on ALL of the true statements below." in white. There are five white rectangular boxes, each containing a statement. A "Click SUBMIT" button with a right-pointing arrow is located in the bottom right corner of the interface.

Practice

Click on ALL of the true statements below.

Conflict between Americans and the British began *after* the Declaration of Independence was signed.

Thomas Jefferson and other American leaders were influenced by Enlightenment ideas.

George Washington was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence.

A belief that the British government had broken its *social contract* with American colonists inspired the writing of the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence announced to the world that the United States was a new nation, separate from Great Britain.

Click SUBMIT

Notes:

Before we move on, let's review what you learned about the people, events, and ideas that led to the Declaration of Independence.

Show what you know by clicking on *all* of the true statements. When you've found them all, click Submit to check your answers.

Correct	Choice
NO	Conflict between Americans and the British began after the Declaration of Independence was signed.
YES	Thomas Jefferson and other American leaders were influenced by Enlightenment ideas.
NO	George Washington was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence.
YES	A belief that the British government had broken its social contract with American colonists inspired the writing of the Declaration of Independence.
YES	The Declaration of Independence announced to the world that the United States was a new nation, separate from Great Britain.

Feedback when correct:

Great job! You have a solid understanding of the Declaration of Independence and the ideas that were on the minds of its authors.

Feedback when incorrect:

The correct answers are shown here. Thomas Jefferson and others were inspired by the Enlightenment in their belief that the British government had broken its social contract with them. So the Declaration of Independence announced that the United States was a new nation. As far as the wrong answers, conflicts between British and Americans began long before the Declaration of Independence, not after. And George Washington didn't write the Declaration — he was too busy leading the Continental Army!

1.6 Introducing the Declaration

Introducing the Declaration

"When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another...they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."

Preamble
Explains purpose, announces separation

Click on the parts of the Declaration of Independence

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

Philosophy Statement
Social contract, natural rights

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

List of Grievances
Examples of tyranny over colonies

"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."

Declaration of Independence

Click NEXT

Notes:

The Declaration of Independence is not a long document. It originally fit on one large piece of paper, like you see here. The text might look like one huge paragraph, but it actually has four distinct parts.

The first part, the Preamble, explains the purpose of the Declaration of Independence. It says that the time has come for the American colonies to separate from Britain.

The second section is what we'll call the Philosophy Statement. It explains the American view of government and the Enlightenment ideas of the social contract and natural rights.

The third section is a long list of grievances, or complaints. It lists examples of actions taken by Britain's government and king to establish total control, or *tyranny*, over the American colonies.

Finally, the document proudly declares American independence. It announces to the world that the former colonies are now the United States of America, with all the rights, powers, and privileges of other nations.

To see a famous quote from each section of the Declaration of Independence, click the rectangles. Click Next when you're ready to move on.

1.7 Practice

The image shows a digital practice interface. At the top, a red banner contains the word "Practice" in white. Below this, the instruction reads: "Match each description (on the right) to the section of the Declaration of Independence (on the left)." The interface features two columns of white boxes with black text. The left column lists four sections: "Part 1: Preamble", "Part 2: Philosophy", "Part 3: List of Grievances", and "Part 4: Declaration of Independence". The right column lists four descriptions: "Explains its purpose; announces separation", "Explains Enlightenment views of social contract, natural rights", "Explains how British government and king have tried to establish tyranny in America", and "Proudly declares to the world that the former colonies are now an independent nation". A "Click SUBMIT" button with a right-pointing arrow is located in the bottom right corner of the interface.

Notes:

Let's practice what you just learned. Drag the descriptions on the right to match the correct sections of the Declaration of Independence on the left. They should fit together like puzzle pieces. Click Submit when you have all the right matches.

Correct	Choice
Part 1: Preamble	Explains its purpose; announces separation
Part 2: Philosophy	Explains Enlightenment views of social contract, natural rights
Part 3: List of Grievances	Explains how British government and king have tried to establish tyranny in America
Part 4: Declaration of Independence	Proudly declares to the world that the former colonies are now an independent nation

Feedback when correct:

Excellent! These are the 4 parts of the Declaration of Independence.

We'll look at each in more detail coming up.

Feedback when incorrect:

The correct matches are shown here. These are the 4 parts of the Declaration of Independence.
We'll look at each in more detail coming up.

1.8 The Preamble

The Preamble

Hover over highlighted words

When in the course of these events, it became necessary to break up; do away with 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.

Here, Jefferson is referring to the natural rights, which will be explained more on the next slide.

to force; make

Click for translation

Click NEXT

Notes:

“Preamble” is another word for introduction. Important documents like the Declaration of Independence often have them. The Preamble of the Declaration explains that the time has come for the former colonies to break away from their mother country. Thomas Jefferson and the other authors realized what a big deal this was. In 1776, no colony had successfully broken away from its parent country - **ever**.

Our Founding Fathers sometimes used some complicated language to say what they meant, so if you'd like the Preamble broken down into simpler terms, click on the picture. Hover over the highlighted words or phrases to see what they mean.

1.9 Enlightenment Philosophy



Notes:

Next comes the Philosophy Statement. Here is where the Enlightenment ideas of Thomas Jefferson and the other authors are on full display. There are 2 big ideas you need to know about: Natural Rights, and the Social Contract.

First, Enlightenment thinkers believed that all humans are born with Natural Rights. "Natural" means that they come from nature. Every human being has them, and they don't come from a king, or a ruler, or a government. They can't be taken away, and they're yours simply by being alive. These rights include life, liberty, human dignity, and the chance to find happiness.

People like Jefferson believed the whole point of having a government was to protect these rights. This leads to the theory of a social contract, which you've learned a little about already. This theory says that governments are like contracts made between those in charge and those they govern - the citizens. What if you signed a contract, and the other side broke it? Would *you* have to follow the *broken* contract? Probably not. This is the meaning of social contract theory. If a government fails to protect the people's natural rights, it has broken its contract with them. The people are then free to walk away from the contract - and make a better one!

1.10 The Philosophy Statement

The Philosophy Statement

All humans possess basic rights. People can "break up" with their government and start a new one.

Natural rights + Social contract = Philosophy of government

Hover over highlighted words

given by God obvious something that cannot be denied

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. 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 to abolish it, and to institute new Government...as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

Click NEXT

Notes:

Here's the Philosophy Statement. It contains some of the most famous words in the history of our country.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. 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 to abolish it, and to institute new Government, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

Let's see how the ideas of natural rights and the social contract show up in these lines. The references to natural rights can be seen in yellow. Thomas Jefferson writes that all people are made the same, and that God and nature have given them certain undisputable rights: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

References to the social contract are seen in green. Jefferson writes that governments are created by - and get their powers from - the people. And it is the "right of the people" to replace their government with a new one if that's what it takes to protect their rights.

Hover over the highlighted words or phrases to see what they mean.

Does all this sound logical to you? Remember that in 1776, these were *revolutionary* ideas.

1.11 Practice

Practice

For each quote, select which Enlightenment idea it refers to more.

"...to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed."	Natural Rights	Social Contract
"all men are created equal"	Natural Rights	Social Contract
Every human being is born with rights that come from God and nature.	Natural Rights	Social Contract
"...they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."	Natural Rights	Social Contract
Governments exist to protect the rights of the governed, and they can be changed.	Natural Rights	Social Contract
"...it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government..."	Natural Rights	Social Contract

Click SUBMIT

Notes:

Let's practice. For each quote, select which Enlightenment idea it refers to more: natural rights or the social contract.

Correct	Natural Rights or Social Contract
NO	Natural Rights - "...to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed"
YES	Social Contract - "...to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed"
YES	Natural Rights- all men are created equal
NO	Social Contract - all men are created equal
YES	Natural Rights - Every human being is born with rights that come from God and nature
NO	Social Contract - Every human being is born with rights that come from God and nature

Correct	Natural Rights or Social Contract
YES	Natural Rights - ...they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness
NO	Social Contract - ...they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness
NO	Natural Rights - Governments exist to protect the rights of the governed, and they can be changed
YES	Social Contract - Governments exist to protect the rights of the governed, and they can be changed
NO	Natural Rights - ...it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government...
YES	Social Contract- ...it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government...

Feedback when correct:

Well done! You have a strong understanding of the Enlightenment ideas found in the Declaration of Independence.

Feedback when incorrect:

The correct answers are shown here. Review this material carefully before moving on.

1.12 Practice

Practice

Which sentence best summarizes ALL of the Enlightenment ideas about government explained in the Philosophy Statement?

Everyone is born equal with the same rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Governments are created to protect rights, and they receive their power from the people.

People have the right to replace their government with one that does a better job protecting their rights.

Since governments are established to protect the natural rights of the people, the people can replace the government if it stops protecting those rights as it was contracted to do.

Click
SUBMIT

Notes:

This exercise may be a bit trickier. Click on the sentence that *best* summarizes *all* of the Enlightenment ideas about government explained in the Philosophy Statement. When you are ready to check your answer, click Submit.

Correct	Choice
NO	Everyone is born equal with the same rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
NO	Governments are created to protect rights, and they receive their power from the people.
NO	People have the right to replace their government with one that does a better job protecting their rights.
YES	Since governments are established to protect the natural rights of the people, the people can replace the government if it stops protecting those rights as it was contracted to do.

Feedback when correct:

Outstanding! You picked the most complete and correct summary from the choices provided.

Feedback when incorrect:

The best answer is shown here. "Since governments are established to protect the natural rights of the people, the people can replace the government if it stops protecting those rights as it was contracted to do." This is the most complete and correct summary of all the ideas found in the Philosophy Statement.

1.13 The List of Grievances

The List of Grievances
Click on each rectangle

"For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent"		Taxing colonists without allowing them a say
"For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world"		Cutting off American trade with other nations
"He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people."		Terminating colonists' local lawmaking bodies
"He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people. "		Destroying the property and lives of colonists
"He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures."		Keeping soldiers in the colonies and forcing colonists to feed and house them

Click NEXT

Notes:

The next section of the Declaration of Independence is a long list of *grievances*. A grievance is a complaint or objection.

"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."

"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."

This section attempts to prove that the British government, and the king in particular, has abused the rights of American colonists. By far, this is the longest part of the Declaration, and it's the part people tend to skip over when they read it today. We'll keep it simple by looking in detail at just 5 of these grievances here.

Click on each of them for further information about what they mean.

1.14 Practice

Practice

Which of these statements is NOT one of the grievances mentioned on the previous slide?

- Colonists have had their trade with other nations "cut off."
- Colonists have had their property and lives "destroyed."
- Colonists have had their lawmaking bodies "dissolved."
- Colonists have lost their right to "trial by jury."
- Colonists have had to play host to "standing armies."
- Colonists have been taxed "without their consent."

Click SUBMIT

Notes:

Which of these is **not** one of the grievances mentioned on the previous slide?

Correct	Choice
NO	Colonists have had their trade with other nations "cut off."
NO	Colonists have had their property and lives "destroyed."
NO	Colonists have had their lawmaking bodies "dissolved."
YES	Colonists have lost their right to "trial by jury."
NO	Colonists have had to play host to "standing armies."
NO	Colonists have been taxed "without their consent."

Feedback when correct:

Correct! This was not one of the grievances you already learned about. However, this complaint is mentioned in the Declaration of Independence: the authors accused the king of "depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury."

Feedback when incorrect:

Here's the correct answer. It wasn't featured on the last slide. However, this complaint is mentioned in the Declaration of Independence: the authors accused the king of "depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury."

1.15 The Real Declaration of Independence



Notes:

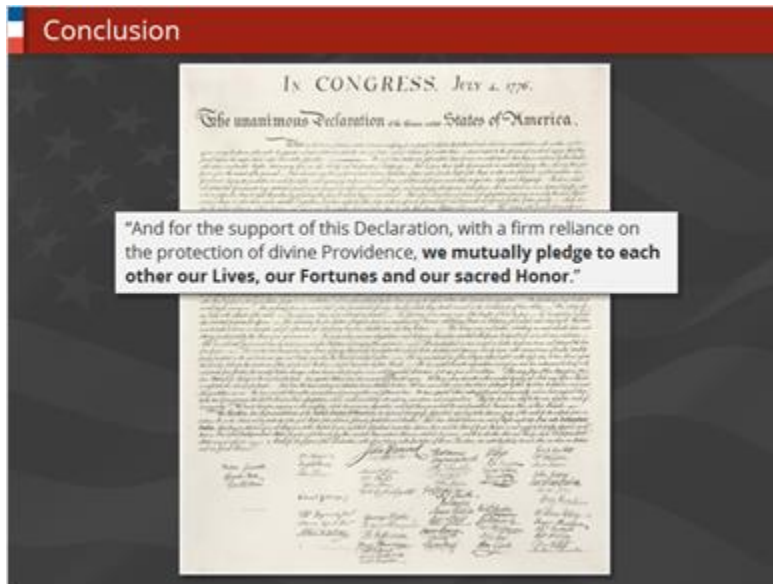
Now we come to the final section. This conclusion is the *actual* Declaration of Independence. After having listed more than 25 grievances against the British government and king, Thomas Jefferson and the other authors proudly *declare* that from this moment on, the United States of America is an *independent* nation.

Here's how they put it: "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, 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."

1.16 Conclusion



Notes:

The Declaration concludes with these dramatic words that bound together those who signed it: “We mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.”

56 Americans signed the Declaration of Independence. You can see their signatures here—the largest one is that of John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress that produced the Declaration. These men were doing something bold and revolutionary by signing their names. To the king of England, they were all guilty of treason—and were now wanted men. The Declaration was not the end of Americans' struggle for independence. It was the beginning. It would take 7 more years, and a long and bloody war, for Great Britain to finally accept that its colonies were an independent nation.

1.17 Practice

Practice

Match each line from the Declaration of Independence on the left to the statement on the right that paraphrases it the best.

"They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."	The rights to live free and be happy are the natural, God-given rights of everyone.
"To secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."	People establish governments, and give them power to rule over them, in exchange for protection of their rights.
"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."	People have the right to change or replace their government when it is not protecting their rights.
"All political connection between [these colonies] and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved."	The former colonies no longer have any connection to Great Britain and are an independent nation.

Click SUBMIT

Notes:

Let's review everything you've learned. On the left are four famous quotes from the Declaration of Independence. You've heard, read, and analyzed them all already. On the right are the same ideas, paraphrased in simpler language. Put the matches together. Good luck!

Correct	Choice
"They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."	The rights to live free and be happy are the natural, God-given rights of everyone.
"To secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."	People establish governments, and give them power to rule over them, in exchange for protection of their rights.

Correct	Choice
<p>“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.”</p>	<p>People have the right to change or replace their government when it is not protecting their rights.</p>
<p>“All political connection between [these colonies] and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved.”</p>	<p>The former colonies no longer have any connection to Great Britain and are an independent nation.</p>

Feedback when correct:

Outstanding! You now recognize and know the meanings of some of the most famous words in the Declaration of Independence.

Feedback when incorrect:

The correct matches are shown here. Read each match in order to review this important information before moving on.

1.18 Practice

Practice

Drag these excerpts into the right sequence so that they appear in the order they are found in the document.

Preamble: When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another...a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

Philosophy Statement: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men...

List of Grievances: The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations... He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

Declaration of Independence: These United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States... And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Click SUBMIT

Notes:

One last practice! Here are some excerpts from the Declaration of Independence. Drag them into the right sequence so they are in the order they are found in the document, from the Preamble to the end, first to last.

Correct Order
When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another...a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.
We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men...
The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations... He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

Correct Order

These United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States... And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Feedback when correct:

Yes! That's the right order. You understand how the language and ideas of the Declaration of Independence fit together. Click Continue to finish this tutorial in style!

Feedback when incorrect:

The correct sequence is shown here. Review this important information before clicking Continue to finish this tutorial.

1.19 Lesson Review

The image shows a lesson review interface with a red header labeled "Lesson Review". On the left, there is a list of topics: "Ideas and structure of the Declaration of Independence", "Enlightenment ideas" (with sub-points "Natural rights" and "Social contract"), and "Grievances with British". On the right, there are four sections, each with a navigation icon and a title:

- MOTIVATION** icon next to **Preamble**
- VIDEO** icon next to **Philosophy Statement**
 - All humans have rights
 - People have the right to change their government
- FACTS** icon next to **List of Grievances**
 - Attacks on citizens
 - Limits on local government
 - Taxation without representation
- EXIT** icon next to **Declaration of Independence**

Notes:

In this tutorial, you learned about the ideas and the structure of the Declaration of Independence, one of America's most famous documents. You learned about the Enlightenment ideas, like natural rights and the social contract, found in the Declaration, and about the grievances colonists had with the British.

The Declaration of Independence explains *why* Americans wanted to establish their own government.

It explains that all humans have rights, and that people have the right to change their government.

It lists numerous examples of how the British government had taken away the rights of Americans.

And it concludes by announcing a new nation: the United States of America.

It's been a pleasure learning with you today!

Credits (Slide Layer)

