



*The Founding: SS.7.CG.1.6*  
**Declaration of Independence**  
**VIDEO #1 SCRIPT**



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## Declaration of Independence Video #1

1. The Declaration of Independence, written in 1776, outlined the colonists' complaints against the king of England and their desire to be free and independent. This document played an important role in the American colonies becoming the United States that we know today. In this video, we will explore the text of the Declaration and dig deeper into some of its big ideas.

2. After watching this video, you will be able to do quite a bit. You'll be able to
- Explain the concept of natural rights as expressed in the Declaration of Independence. You'll also be able to
  - Identify the Natural and Unalienable Rights specifically expressed in the Declaration of Independence (Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness). You should also be able to
  - Analyze the relationship between natural rights and the role of government.
  - Recognize natural rights, social contract, limited government, and right of resistance to tyrannical government.

This is quite a bit, so let's go ahead and get started.

3. *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.*

4. Such famous words from our Declaration of Independence. You may have heard some of these words before: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. These ideas are called natural rights. Natural rights are rights individuals are born with and cannot be taken away by the government, which means they are unalienable. The writers of the Declaration of Independence believed that natural rights were very important. They made natural rights a main focus of the document and the main reason for seeking independence from England. So, what does "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" mean?

5. The natural right to life means that individuals, and not the government, have control over their lives. Limits on this right exist, though, when an individual tries to deny another person their own rights. But for the most part, the natural right to life means that you control your own life.

6. Liberty means individuals have the right to be free. Limits to liberty exist when one person's liberty prevents another person from having their own. Being free would be more fully explained in the Constitution's Bill of Rights.

7. The "pursuit of happiness" is whatever individuals define as making them happy. Individuals have the right to try to achieve goals that will lead to their own personal happiness. The only limit to this pursuit of happiness exists when they interfere with another person's natural rights.

8. So our natural rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness do have a limit. Our rights cannot interfere with somebody else's. And one of the jobs of government is to try and make sure that we balance all of our natural rights.

9. Let's check in. Try to answer each of the following questions in your own words.

10. What are natural rights?

11. ANSWER TO QUESTION

12. What are the natural rights specifically listed in the Declaration of Independence?

13. ANSWER TO QUESTION

14. Let's recap what we've learned so far. Remember that natural rights are unalienable. This means that individuals are born with natural rights and they can't be taken away by the government. The natural rights in the Declaration are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

15. Life means that individuals control their own lives. Liberty means that individuals have the right to be free. And the pursuit of happiness means that individuals have the right to try and achieve goals that make them happy. But remember, our natural rights cannot interfere with somebody else's. So we understand natural rights. Let's talk now about the role of government.

16. In the Declaration of Independence, the authors state that the government does not give individuals natural rights; instead, we're born with these. So what is the role of government in relation to natural rights? Actually, governments are formed to secure and protect natural rights. It is the government's responsibility to protect the natural rights of individuals and in return government gets its power from we the people. This concept is called the consent of the governed, an element of limited government and the social contract. But what happens when the government doesn't protect the people's natural rights?

17. When a government does not protect the peoples' natural rights, it becomes oppressive and tyrannical. A tyranny is a government that abuses its power. If a tyranny is in place, the people have the right to 'alter or abolish' the government. That means they have the right to end it.

18. Let's check in. Try to answer the following question in your own words.

19. What is the relationship between the government and the natural rights of the people?

20. ANSWER TO QUESTION

21. Let's recap. Remember that individuals are born with natural rights and they cannot be taken away by the government. The natural rights in the Declaration are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And when the government does not protect natural rights, the people have the right to alter or abolish the government.

22. The main argument of the Declaration of Independence is that the government has the responsibility to protect natural rights, and this wasn't happening. In the other video in this module, you'll learn about the complaints and grievances had with England and how these connected to natural rights and the role of the government.

23. To get a better sense of the ways in which the English government violated natural rights, be sure to watch video 2, Colonial Complaints and Grievances, to learn more.