



*The Founding: From Colonies to
the United States: SS.7.CG.1.6*
Declaration of Independence
READING #3

Name: _____

Date: _____



SS.7.CG.1.6 Benchmark Clarification 3: Students will recognize natural rights, social contract, limited government and the right of resistance to tyrannical government.

One of the basic roles of government is to protect the **natural rights** of individuals. According to the **Declaration of Independence**, government does not *give* individuals these natural rights. Individuals are *born* with these rights, and government protects these rights with the **consent of the governed**. Government, then, gets its power from the people who are being governed.

When the government becomes **oppressive** and does not protect the rights of the people, it becomes a **tyranny**. If this happens, the people have the right to “alter or abolish” the government (change it or replace it with another government).

John Locke’s idea of natural rights is expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Natural rights are rights granted by nature to people at birth, and cannot be taken away by government. These rights include “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”.

“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.”

Locke’s idea of social contract is also expressed in the Declaration of Independence. A social contract is an agreement among the people to set up a government and obey its laws.

“...That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men...”

The Declaration of Independence limits government power by highlighting that government receives its power from the people and thus can only exist to serve them.

“...deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...”

The Declaration of Independence symbolizes resistance to tyrannical government and empowers the governed to withhold their power from government if tyranny or abuse occurs.

“...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...”

consent of the governed - an agreement made by the people to establish a government and obey its laws

Declaration of Independence - a document written in 1776 that listed the basis for democratic government and the grievances of the colonists

natural rights - the belief that individuals are born with basic rights that cannot be taken away by governments

oppression - the use of authority or power in a cruel or unjust manner

social contract - an implied agreement among the people of an organized society that defines the rights, duties, and limitations of the governed and the government

tyranny - a government that abuses its power