

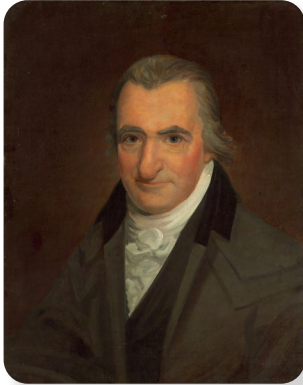
Name:

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Common Sense (1776) by Thomas Paine

Instructions: Read the article to answer the questions below.

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Thomas Paine arrived in the colonies from England in November 1774. Settling in Philadelphia, Paine wrote for *Pennsylvania Magazine*, where he covered a number of political issues.

In 1775, men from the 13 American colonies fought soldiers from Great Britain in the first battles of the American Revolution. Most colonists did not want to separate from Britain. They simply wanted Britain to stop taxing them and to start treating them fairly. But many leaders began to realize that independence was the only option.

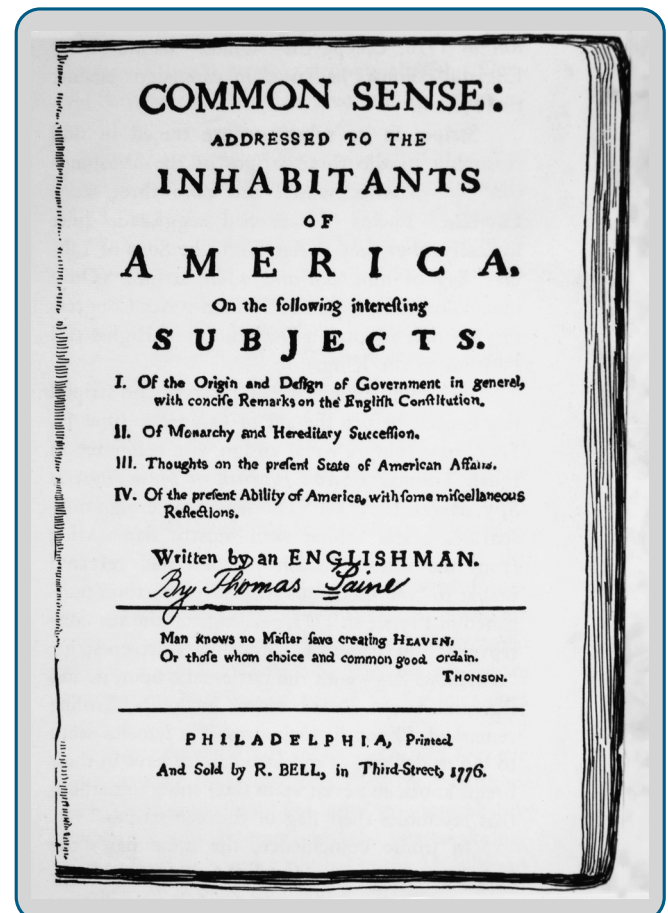
Paine expressed this viewpoint in *Common Sense*. In this published pamphlet, he went against the popular belief that **reconciliation**, or becoming friendly again after an argument or disagreement, should be the primary goal. Instead, Paine said independence was the only reasonable course of action.

Common Sense was immediately popular. The first printing of 1,000 copies sold out within days. The form of the work had much to do with its popularity. Its pamphlet style made it inexpensive to print, publish, and purchase. Its short length and simple language made it easy to understand and meant that it could be read aloud to all audiences.

In the pamphlet, Paine argues that political truths should be grounded in common-sense principles, saying, "There is something absurd, in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island." He also frames the colonists' struggle as universal, stating, "The cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind."

Paine rejected monarchy and embraced a representative government, which is a republic governed by the people. *Common Sense* drove public opinion away from loyalty to Britain in favor of declaring independence. *Common Sense* framed rebellion as a worthy and noble endeavor.

Paine's writing not only shifted public opinion but also



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inspired America's founders to pursue independence, despite the risk of being charged with treason. In an April 1, 1776, letter to his aide Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Reed, George Washington wrote, "...by private Letters which I have lately received from Virginia, I find common sense is working a powerful change there in the Minds of many Men."

In the months following the publication of *Common Sense*, the calls for independence intensified, culminating in the July 4, 1776, approval of the Declaration of Independence. This proclamation drew significant inspiration in both content and language from Paine's *Common Sense*.

1. Why did Thomas Paine name his pamphlet *Common Sense*?
2. How did Thomas Paine's arguments in *Common Sense* reach a wide audience?
3. How did *Common Sense* influence colonists' views on fighting for independence from Britain?
4. What lasting impact did Thomas Paine's ideas in *Common Sense* have on the United States?

Common Sense (1776) by Thomas Paine Answer Key

1. Why did Thomas Paine name his pamphlet *Common Sense*?

Thomas Paine named his pamphlet Common Sense because he wanted people to see that independence was not complicated and the most logical option. He believed it was the most obvious choice to make.

2. How did Thomas Paine's arguments in *Common Sense* reach a wide audience?

Thomas Paine's arguments in Common Sense reached a wide audience through the simple language he used. That made it easy to read aloud and easy to understand. It also was not expensive to print, so he could create and distribute many copies.

3. How did *Common Sense* influence colonists' views on fighting for independence from Britain?

Common Sense influenced colonists' views on fighting for independence from Britain by convincing them to agree with the idea that gaining full independence was necessary. Colonists were convinced that the cause was worth it because it was a "universal struggle." Instead of just trying to reconcile with Britain, colonists started to see rebellion as a noble action.

4. What lasting impact did Thomas Paine's ideas in *Common Sense* have on the United States?

Thomas Paine's ideas in Common Sense had a lasting impact on the United States because they contributed to the creation of the nation. The way he influenced colonists' points of view had an impact on the American Revolution and in turn, the Declaration of Independence. Even George Washington recognized the impact of his ideas. Common Sense helped shape ideas about democracy and a government by the people, which are still part of the United States today.