

American Government In-Class Activity

Name:

Foundations of American Government Thomas Paine

Directions: The following excerpts are from Thomas Paine's writing *Common Sense*. Originally published in 1776 this pamphlet lays out Paine's theory on why the American colonies should declare independence. You will be working with your groups to answer the following questions. Each group will be assigned a different quote to work with, and you will be given time to talk with other groups who had the same question.

Quote 1: "But there is another and greater distinction for which no truly natural or religious reason can be assigned, and that is the distinction of men into KINGS and SUBJECTS. Male and female are the distinctions of nature, good and bad the distinctions of heaven; but how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species, is worth inquiring into, and whether they are the means of happiness or of misery to mankind."

Question 1: How does he support his argument that "no natural or religious reason can be assigned" to the distinction between kings and subjects?

Quote 2: "This new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England, that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home, pursues their descendants still. . . ."

Question 2: What explanation does Paine give for people coming to the American colonies?

Quote 3: "Europe is too thickly planted with kingdoms to be long at peace, and whenever a war breaks out between England and any foreign power, the trade of America goes to ruin, because of her connection with Britain."

Question 3: Economically speaking why is Paine saying it is a disadvantage to be tied to Britain?

Quote 4: "A government of our own is our natural right: and when a man seriously reflects on the precariousness of human affairs, he will become convinced, that it is infinitely wiser and safer, to form a Constitution of our own in a cool deliberate manner, while we have it in our power, than to trust such an interesting event to time and chance. . . ."

Question 4: Why does Paine stress that the American colonies should begin forming a government now?