Historian's interpretation #1: Modified Excerpts from *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* by Bernard Bailyn (1967)

The Declaration of Independence represents the colonists' deepest fears and beliefs. The colonists believed they saw a clear pattern in the events that followed 1763. They believed they saw an evil and deliberate conspiracy to crush liberty in America. They saw evidence of this conspiracy in the Stamp Act and in the Coercive Acts.

They also believed that America was destined to play a special role in history. They believed that America would become "the foundation of a great and mighty empire, the largest the world ever saw to be founded on such principles of liberty and freedom, both civil and religious." The colonists believed that England was trying to enslave them, and that they should use "all the power which God has given them" to protect themselves.

Historian's interpretation #2: Modified Excerpts from *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn (1980)

It seemed clear to the educated, upper-class colonists that something needed to be done to persuade the lower class to join the revolutionary cause, to direct their anger against England. The solution was to find language inspiring to all classes, specific enough in its listing of grievances to fill people with anger against the British, vague enough to avoid class conflict, and stirring enough to build patriotic feelings.

Everything the Declaration of Independence was about – popular control over governments, the right of rebellion and revolution, fury at political tyranny, economic burdens, and military attacks – was well suited to unite large numbers of colonists and persuade even those who had grievances against one another to turn against England. Some Americans were clearly omitted from those united by the Declaration of Independence: Indians, black slaves, and women.

Why did the Founding Fathers write the Declaration of Independence?

Record what each historian believes in the chart below.

Historian #1	
Claim: *The Founding Fathers wrote the Declaration of Independence because . . .*	**Evidence:**
Historian #2:	
Claim:	**Evidence:**

American Declaration of Independence

When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for 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.

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, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Vocabulary

dissolve: disappear
bands: connections
station: place
impel: force
self-evident: obvious
endowed: given
unalienable: cannot be taken away
to secure: to get
instituted: established
deriving: getting
consent: agreement

In the space below, re-write the Declaration of Independence in your own words:

American Declaration of Independence

(1) 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. **(2)** That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. **(3)** That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government.

Vocabulary

self-evident: obvious
endowed: given
unalienable: cannot be taken away
to secure: to protect
instituted: set up
deriving: getting
just: fair
consent: agreement
ends: goals
alter: change
abolish: to get rid of

Put the paragraph in your own words:

(1) We believe in these obvious truths: that all men are created equal, that they

(2) In order to protect these rights, governments are set up. These governments get their powers from

(3)

Declaration of Independence Grievances Name_____

Directions: Below are most of the grievances from the Declaration of Independence.

- If the grievance seems to be something that would affect only the rich and powerful, write **O** (for ONLY rich and powerful)
- If the grievance seems to be something that would affect all the colonists, write **A** (for ALL the colonists)
- If you don't know who would be affected, write **'?'**

(1 & 2) He has refused to pass, and forbidden his governors to pass, important and necessary laws. _____

(5 & 6) He has broken up certain legislatures that opposed him, and refused to let others be elected. _____

(8 & 9) He has refused to establish courts of justice, and has made judges dependent on him for their jobs and salaries. _____

(10) He has sent swarms of British officers to harass our people and eat our food. _____

(11 & 12) He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without the consent of our legislatures. _____

(16) For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world; _____

(17) For imposing taxes on us without our consent; _____

(18) For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury; _____

(23 & 24) He is waging war against us; He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people. _____

(27) He has started fights among us and has also forced us to live near merciless Indian savages. _____

1. Do these grievances seem to be things that upset rich people or everyone?

2. Do you think these complaints would give people reason to go to war and possibly die? Why or why not?