



Student Handout 2: Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*

Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was born in England to a poor Quaker father and Anglican mother and left school at the age of 13 to work with his father as a corset maker. He tried a variety of occupations (including collecting excise duties on liquor and tobacco), none successfully. After meeting Benjamin Franklin in London, he emigrated to the colonies in late 1774 and got a job editing the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. Tensions between England and the colonies were high, and Paine soon leapt into the fray. After the Battle of Lexington and Concord, on April 19, 1775, Paine concluded that the revolt should be aimed not just against unjust taxation but in favor of full independence. His arguments were spelled out in *Common Sense*, a fifty page pamphlet that was published on January 10, 1776. It was an immediate sensation. More than 100,000 copies were sold within three months – and possibly as many as 500,000 copies altogether – to a colonial population of but two and a half million people. More than any other single publication, Paine's *Common Sense* persuaded public opinion the case for independence from Great Britain.*

*Diane Ravitch, ed., *The American Reader: Words that Moved a Nation* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 25.

Instructions: Read passages 1-3. Skim through each passage and circle the unfamiliar words. Use a dictionary to define each word and make annotations to the text. Read the text and highlight or underline the line or segment that you feel was the most important within the passage.

Common Sense (1776) by Thomas Paine¹

Reading #1

But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families....Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America. 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. (pages 86-87)

Reading #2

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 to Britain*. (page 89)

Reading #3



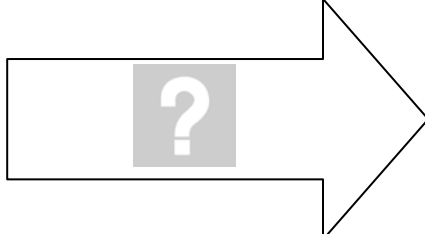
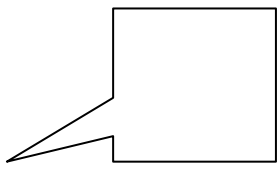
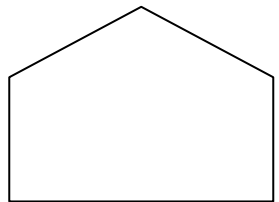
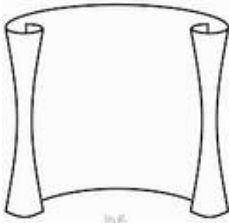
But where says some is the King of America? I'll tell you Friend, he reigns above, and doth not make havoc of mankind like the Royal Brute of Britain. Yet that we may not appear to be defective even in earthly honors, let a day be solemnly set apart for proclaiming the charter; let it be brought forth placed on the divine law, the word of God; let a crown be placed thereon, by which the world may know, that so far as we approve as monarchy, that in America THE LAW IS KING. For as in absolute governments the King is law, so in free countries the law *ought* to be King; and there ought to be no other. (page 99)

¹ Thomas Paine, *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, Collected and Edited by Moncure Daniel Conway (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1894). Vol. 1.



Student Handout 3a: Primary Source Analysis

Historian's Tools*

 <p>Author/Speaker/Creator</p>	 <p>Audience/Listener/Recipient</p>
 <p>Purpose</p>	 <p>Document Content</p>
 <p>Historical Context</p>	 <p>Type of Document</p>

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Student Handout 3b: Primary Source Analysis

Historian's Tools*

<p style="text-align: center;">Audience/Listener/Recipient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who was the document written for? • How does this information help you to understand this document? 		<p style="text-align: center;">Author/Speaker/Creator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who wrote the document? • What is their occupation, background, etc. • How does this information help you understand this document?
<p style="text-align: center;">Document Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the author saying? • What details are important? • What is the main idea of the reading? <p>(See Student Handout 4: Understanding Common Sense)</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is the author writing this document? • Does the author want something specific to happen by writing this document?
<p style="text-align: center;">Type of Document</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of document is it? • How does this information help you understand this document? 		<p style="text-align: center;">Historical Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where was this written? • When was this written? • What important things were going on at the time that relate to the document? • How does this information help you understand this document?

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