



1 8 T H A N N U A L

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association Essay Contest



 PUEBLO CITY-COUNTY
Library District

Sponsored by the Pueblo Home of Heroes Association
and Pueblo City-County Library District

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association

The mission of the Pueblo Home of Heroes Association is to preserve and expand the memorial dedicated to Medal of Honor recipients; to advance the history of the Medal of Honor; honor the legacy of those who have received the Award nationwide; to promote democratic ideals; and encourage among the people of the United States, and especially its youth, citizenship, character, integrity, and selflessness as epitomized by the Medal of Honor.

The Pueblo Medal of Honor Association began in 1997 when Robert H. Rawlings, owner and publisher of The Pueblo Chieftain, began a project to create a Memorial as a lasting testament featuring bronze statues honoring Pueblo's four Medal of Honor recipients: William J. Crawford – Army WWII, Carl L. Sitter – Marines Korea, Raymond G. “Jerry” Murphy – Marines Korea, and Drew D. Dix – Army Vietnam. Additionally, the names of all the over 3,500 recipients of the Medal of Honor would be listed on granite plaques.

This Association successfully bid for, and brought

to Pueblo, the Congressional Medal of Honor Society for their national convention in September of 2000. It was held at the time of the unveiling of the Medal of Honor Memorial. Ninety-seven out of 147 Medal of Honor recipients living at the time were in attendance, which allowed thousands of Pueblans, and Coloradoans, to be able to meet and visit with America's greatest military heroes.

In 2009, the Pueblo Home of Heroes Association created this essay contest to draw the attention of Pueblo students to the true heroism represented by the recipients of the Medal of Honor. The Association raises money for JROTC scholarships, upkeep of the Medal of Honor memorial, as well as a Medal of Honor interactive display inside the Convention Center which was updated in 2022. The Walk of Valor around the Historic Arkansas Riverwalk was upgraded by this association to include sign posts with QR codes at each memorial or significant stop, to help explain why it is important to Pueblo's history.



This display is free and open to the public during regular hours at the Pueblo Convention Center.



This year there were two themes, one for 4th and 5th graders, and another for the 6th through 12th grades.

Teachers for the 4th and 5th grades were asked to discuss with their students about the importance of the Declaration of Independence as the first formal statement to England that the American Colonies will no longer accept the rule of King George III and the British Government. Teachers were encouraged to ask students to submit an essay answering the following question:

“George Washington was an important part of the American Revolution. What were his major contributions up to, during, and after our war of Independence?”

The 6th through 12th grade teachers were encouraged to discuss the importance of the Declaration of Independence as the first formal statement to England that the American Colonies will no longer accept the rule of King George III and the British Government and become known as the United States of America. After learning about the beginning of the Colonies’ new government and Declaration, students were encouraged to write an essay about their thoughts on what the statements in the Preamble mean to them and the effect they have had on our country.

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association, in cooperation with Pueblo City-County Library District, is pleased to announce the winners of the 18th annual essay contest.

The following guidelines were required:

All entries must be typed.
300 – 500 words for grades 4 and 5
400 – 700 words for grades 6-8
500 – 1,000 words for grades 9-12

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association judges Kevin Cover, Gary and Karen Micheli, Don and Mary Gray, Dave Rush, Amy Nelson, and Frank Spinuzzi. There were 375 entries this year.

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association and Pueblo City-County Library District wish to thank teachers and parents for encouraging their students and children to participate in this essay contest.

A special thanks to the Pueblo City-County Library District for their assistance each year with this essay contest.



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you may contact us at 719-544-2435



Winners

Elementary School (grades 4-5)

1st Place – Selena Guerra, age 11

Prairie Winds Elementary, Mrs. Powell

2nd Place – Jy Kincannon, age 11

Prairie Winds Elementary, Mrs. Powell

3rd Place – Ariaiah Busby, age 11

Pueblo Classical Academy, Mrs. Guzman

Middle School (grades 6-8)

1st Place – Mariah Bickle, age 13

Vineland Middle School, Ms. Brittany Spencer

2nd Place – Hunter Mutz, age 14

Skyview Middle School, Mr. Patrick Mikasa

3rd Place – Violet Childs, age 13

Vineland Middle School, Ms. Brittany Spencer

Honorable Mention – Abrielle Rahner, age 12

Vineland Middle School, Ms. Brittany Spencer

Honorable Mention – Kylie Snell, age 13

Vineland Middle School, Ms. Brittany Spencer

Honorable Mention – Alexa “Alix” Childers, age 13

Connect Charter School, Ms. Woodsworth

High School (grades 9-12)

1st Place – Abraham Campos, age 15

Pueblo West High School, LTC Emond

2nd Place – McKenze Berkley, age 15

Rye High School, Mr. Estes

3rd Place – Cora Marmolejo, age 17

Pueblo West High School, LTC Emond

Honorable Mention – Jeanette Adame-Hernandez, age 17

East High School, Mr. Raymond LeMasters

Honorable Mention – Malcolm Cummings, age 17

Pueblo West High School, LTC Emond

Honorable Mention – Audrinna Juanes, age 16

Pueblo West High School, LTC Emond

Selena Guerra

1st Place, Elementary School

Prairie Winds Elementary, age 11, Mrs. Powell

When the United States needed someone to help them defeat the British, no one stood up-but who? Who? That, my friend, would be George Washington. Through and through, George Washington was a very important part of the Revolutionary War, before and after the war.

First of all, George Washington's contribution before the war helped him learn the skills of a general, which would help him in the Revolutionary War when he was elected general. He became a soldier in the army until one day the governor sent him on an important mission to get rid of the French. He became a general to lead an army to remove them, which helped start the French and Indian War, but he did not get any thanks. Talk about all that work for nothing!

In addition, George Washington helped lead the army in the Revolutionary War with his bravery, courage, and carefulness. He led the Congress. He was angry about how the people who moved to the new world were treated unfairly, plus how the other states felt angry too, so he decided they had enough. They sent the Declaration of Independence across the ocean to Great Britain. The Declaration of Independence was a sign of war. They finally got the French army and their navy to help them defeat the British. The war

finally ended by the Treaty of Paris.

Finally, when the people asked him to be a king or a very high social state, he said no. Instead, he helped organize the Constitutional Conventions. He led a meeting and signed the

Constitution of the United States. After they had the first national vote, he of course got elected president the first and second time. He didn't want to do it a third time, so he made it a rule that presidents can only serve for two terms.

Here's a fun fact I learned: he had the highest honor of a general. From beginning to end, he led them bravely and carefully. Though he died, he will always be remembered, and that is the end-but never the end of that great story. Thus, George Washington was an important part in making this country before and after the war.

In conclusion, George Washington was the best president to contribute to the American Revolution. George Washington made us our own country. He really is the home of the hero. He helped us through hard times, even with the highs and lows of the town. Now people in America are thanking George Washington for what he has done in the world.



Jy Kincannon

2nd Place, Elementary School

Prairie Winds Elementary, age 11, Mrs. Powell

George Washington was one of the most influential founding fathers for a myriad of reasons. When America was on the brink of revolution, we needed a leader. He stepped up and gave us one. He contributed before, during, and after the war to shape America into the country we know today.

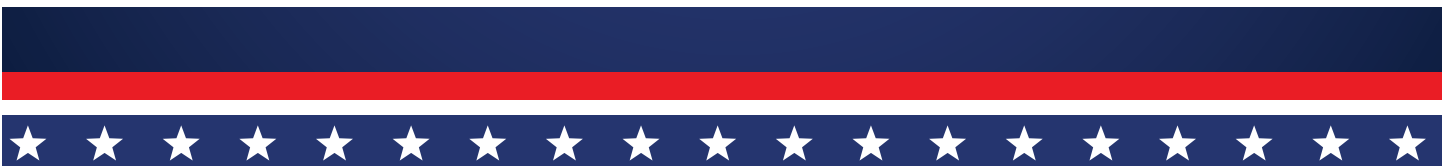
Before the war, George Washington worked on a farm with his father, Augustine Washington, his mother, Mary Ball Washington, and his brothers Samuel, John Augustine, Charles Washington, and half-brothers Lawrence and Augustine Jr. His father died when George was eleven. He went to live with his half-brother Lawrence at Mount Vernon. After Lawrence died, George joined the Virginia militia and served in the French and Indian War.

During the war, George Washington was the general of the Continental Army. He led his country through countless battles including the Battle of Long Island, the Battle of Boston, and the Battle of Trenton. He also crossed the Delaware River. He had trouble

getting across due to the ice; the boats were tortoises slowly moving along. He was as stealthy as a fox. When he got across, he surprised the Hessian soldiers and took over nine hundred prisoners. George knew that the small, important battles were the ones to win. He led America through the Battle of Yorktown and won the war.

After the war, George Washington was elected the first president. He was elected president for two terms. He oversaw four states joining the United States, including Vermont, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Rhode Island. After his terms, George went home to Mount Vernon. He lived there with Martha and their four children. He lived there for two years and died at the age of sixty-seven.

Clearly, George Washington was one of the most important founding fathers. He led us through our fight for freedom and helped us win the war that set up free from Great Britain. He worked hard to keep this country going. Indeed, George Washington was a needed part of America.



Ariah Busby

3rd Place, Elementary School

Pueblo Classical Academy, age 11, Mrs. Guzman

George Washington was an important part of the American Revolution. His major contribution before the war was military experience during the French and Indian War, where he served as a British officer. This helped him learn leadership, organization of supplies, and how to command an army. He was also a leader in Virginia and spoke up when he felt Great Britain was treating them unfair.

During the American Revolution, Washington became the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army and played a very important role in helping America when it's freedom. His army was small, poorly trained, and did not have enough food, clothes, or supplies but he did not give up. He worked hard to turn regular farmers and workers into trained soldiers, he changed an inexperienced army into a force where instead of fighting big battles, he would use surprise attacks, just like the surprise attack at the Battle of Trenton in New Jersey, which gave the people hope. In

1781, he worked with the French to defeat the British at the Siege of Yorktown, which helped end the war. Washington's leadership, bravery, and determination kept the army together for 8 long years and helped the United States win its independence.

After the war ended in 1783, Washington did something important, he gave up his power and returned home instead of becoming king. In 1787 he was chosen to lead the Constitutional Convention, where leaders created the U.S. Constitution. His leadership helped the states work together and agree on a new government. In 1789, Washington became the first President of the United States. As president, he helped organize the new government, set up the first presidential Cabinet and federal court system. After serving two terms, Washington stepped down from office, setting an important example for future presidents.





Mariah Bickle

1st Place, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 13, Ms. Brittany Spencer

The Declaration of Independence is what has made America what it is to this day. The preamble had some of the most important lines that are still used now, and if our founding fathers had not said some of those words, it would have made a huge difference in our culture. They wrote it to confront the king of his wrong doing and establish our independent country. Everyone has their own opinion on the Declaration, and what it has done for our country.

The first important line of the preamble is, "All men are created equal." This sentence is one of the most famous phrases in America because anyone can be anything at any time. I am very lucky to have been born when I was. Women and blacks were treated in a terrible way, the way no one should be. I have never gotten judged for being a girl. I can grow up to be whatever I want to be. As a woman, I can be rich or own land. I would not need a husband if I did not want one, or kids. I also think that it impacted our country more than it did myself. Our country would have been so different if people were not equal. Women may not be able to vote, work many jobs, or people might not have known to read and write. The only people with a say may still be white men who own land.

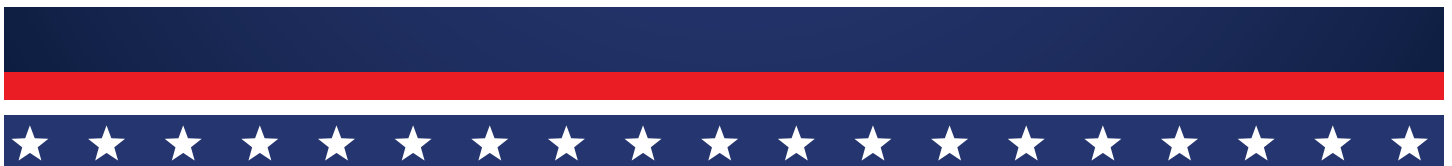
Similarly, "Endowed by their Creator," is equally important because the rights we have and the laws we must follow are not only created by our government but the good morals given to us by our creator. This is a blessing. We are free to live in a country, where we can think our own thoughts about our government whether it is good or bad without getting punished. Having a government like this gives us hope and a chance to constantly improve our way of living in this country.

With "certain inalienable rights," we are free to live our lives the way we choose. This phrase gave us as Americans rights that are rooted in a natural law.

We exist as human beings not to be controlled by a government but free to live in a society. We have laws, but the freedom to make our own choices. The meaning of inalienable itself means that it cannot be taken away from us. Our rights still don't change even when the government does. This was purposefully established by our Founding Fathers.

The last words they spoke in the preamble was, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." I love how we can wake up and to do as we please or need. We can dress however, be polite, or rude, work or not, eat any kind of food we crave and so many more things. Most people take this for granted, and I believe everyone should be thankful for how lucky we really are. Our liberty is actually what makes America, America. We can talk, act and do as we please without the government fully controlling us. We have liberty to where we can be our own person and follow our dreams. That is where the "pursuit of happiness" comes in. The moment you are old enough to think for yourself, you can choose your future. Of course things happen. If you were raised poorly, or have given up on your dreams, things may be harder to accomplish, but you can always change your fate. There are circumstances beyond our control, but how we respond to those challenges build character. You can grow up poor and then become rich at a young age, or the other way around. Your life is a product of the decisions you make.

The Declaration of Independence was not something that the Founding Fathers had accomplished but their goal for our country. As they said, "We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortune, and our future." What they meant was that they risked everything, just for Americans to have the freedom that only they could dream of.



Hunter Mutz

2nd Place, Middle School

Skyview Middle School, age 14, Mr. Patrick Mikasa

All men and women are created equal and are no better than one another. In the United States of America we all believe that everybody should get the same rights, are treated the same, and should all be able to pursue things that they enjoy. The United States was one of the first modern countries to give you unalienable rights. The Bill of Rights was made to protect the freedoms of Americans. Equality, life, liberty, and God-given rights are the “DNA” of our country. No monarch, dictator, or any person should be able to take any of your unalienable rights away.

Being created equal does not mean that you are born tall, short, or small, it means that everybody has the same status and is not born as a king or born as a slave. When you look at every single person and strip away everything that they have you just see a human being with the same needs and rights as everybody else. In 1865 when slavery was abolished people still did not have the same rights as others, and in 1920 women could finally vote. Even though we had all these rights many people were not granted them. Equal rights keeps this country fair and welcomes everyone. Equal rights, like being able to vote, is what runs our democracy.

All rights are given to us by God or by our creator. If a king gives you a right it is more like a privilege and they can take it away but if our “creator” gives it to us it is infinitely permanent. All inalienable rights cannot be sold, traded or given away; it is a part of every human’s life. This is one of the main points in the Declaration of Independence. In (U.S. 1776) it states “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... “ This has held up in our government and will never change.

The Declaration of Independence mentions life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness not separate but all linked together. To have one you need all three; if one of these are gone then none of them work. Life is your physical existence and needs safety. Liberty is what drives your freedom to choose things, to be different from others, to think differently; liberty runs our democracy. The Pursuit of Happiness is what makes us want to be living like our personal goals, family, friends, and passions. The United States has all three and that’s what makes this country great for citizens. Most people’s ancestors came here to live a better life and that’s what the USA stands for. Without all these our country would not be as diverse and democracy wouldn’t work properly because everybody would think the same way.

All people are created equal and they have certain inalienable rights that can never be taken away, are endowed by their creator, and should be able to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. All of these keep this country running and welcome to everyone. Equality isn’t a privilege; it’s a birthright. Every person is endowed with fundamental rights that no authority can delete the right to live however you want, the right to personal liberty, and the right to pursue a life of meaning and joy.



Violet Childs

3rd Place, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 13, Ms. Brittany Spencer

To me, the Declaration of Independence is a statement on the injustice that was happening at the time with the people and how they felt about it. The Declaration of Independence is described as a reflection of the American mind and I could not agree more. It is a representation of what every American and human out there deserves and wants out of their government and what rights they are entitled to. All and all I think the Preamble shows this almost perfectly. It gives a clear view of the desires of the public and is still very relevant today in every way.

The first and arguably most important part of the Preamble to me is the line that said that all men are created equal. To me, this is a very powerful and relevant statement, especially for the time when it was written. It was a concept that many struggled to understand and many still do today. It states that everyone is the same no matter race, gender, identity, sexuality, or religion and should be treated as such. No one is any better or more deserving of something because of how they were born or what they believe. This one simple statement helped progress equality in so many ways even if most of it came centuries later. None of the rights we currently have would have been possible without this belief such as women voting, the abolishment of slavery, and the end of segregation in schools, public transport, restrooms, and workplaces. It was a revolutionary concept and improved the lives of so many people in America.

The second part of the Declaration of Independence that sticks out to me is where it says that we are endowed by our creator. This is an important part to me because it tells plainly that we are all entitled to the same rights and opportunities as we were all made by the same god and share the same DNA. To them and to many today God was the one and only king that mattered. The rights that were given to them were given to them by the cabinet of heaven

and could not be taken away by any mortal man. The tyranny of the king was against the word of God and they would not stand for it any longer. A belief that helped take down the monarchy in America.

The next part that stuck with me was inalienable rights. This means that the rights we have are something we were born with and not a privilege that could be taken away. It means that no matter who you are or where you came from you had rights that belonged solely to you and could not be taken away. It's a seemingly basic idea with such meaning behind it. It shows just how much that the king tried to take from people. He attempted to strip away the very rights people were born with

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness means a lot to me. These are the basic human rights given to every person ever born. It shows just how little the people had at the time. It should have been obvious that humans should be allowed to live how they want but it wasn't. Everyone has permission to live, to have proper justice, and to be happy. No matter who you are, what you look like, where you came from, or anything of the sort, you have the right to be human. The fact that they had to write this shows how mistreated the people were that they didn't even have the right to be happy or live as they pleased.

In conclusion, the Declaration of Independence was a radical and important document that built the foundation for what is now our country. It reflects the American mind in every line of its paragraphs. It shows what the people desired and what they believed they deserved.

Without it I wouldn't be in class today writing this. I am so grateful to be born in this country and for the opportunity to be here and free today.



Abrielle Rahner

Honorable Mention, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 12, Ms. Brittany Spencer

The Declaration of Independence has played a very important role in American history. There are many crucial parts of the preamble, and the meaning behind all of them have had a huge effect on our country. Some of these things have hit me harder than others, but they all have significant value to our country's legacy. There is a very influential meaning behind each phrase in the preamble, and they all give hope and courage to the people of the USA. Each person may have their own opinion about them, but no doubt that this document has brought America to what it is today.

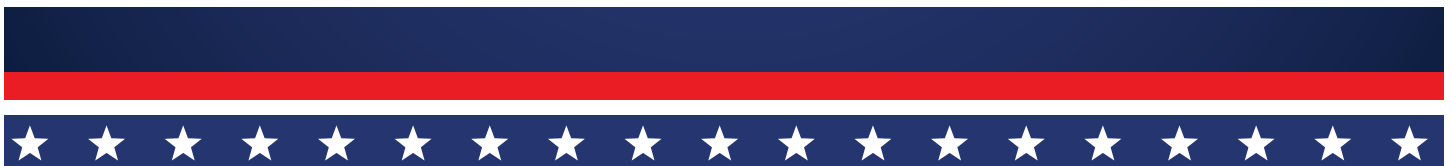
To begin our exploration of the preamble, I will start with the quote, "all men are created equal." To me, this means all people, which means men, women, children, and all races should have equal rights. It means to treat everyone equally and to not favor anybody over somebody else, no matter who you were. This has affected our country by creating a trust and a strong bond between the people. It also helped grow people's audacity and self-determination. This helped build America's bold personality that has kept us going, even in the hardest of times. I see people speaking out for what they believe daily. Even if it is not what's right, the declaration clearly says we all have freedom of speech.

On that note, the preamble also says, "Endowed by their Creator." This means to not idealize a man. In my opinion, this means to not compare a person to the one true God. It is to make sure you are not forgetting to keep God above anything else, like a sport, school work, or even your love. It's to only let God judge you, and to ensure that everybody has equal rights. It means to make sure that no man says what you can and can't do, what is right and what is wrong. This has affected our country because it gives us the ability to have our own beliefs, and to make sure we humble ourselves.

In addition to that, the preamble says, "Inalienable rights." This means the rights of the people cannot be taken away. In my opinion, it means to stand up for what you believe, and to not let anybody ever take those away from you and the people you love. It makes sure that nobody can take away the rights and freedom that was given to us long ago. This affects the country because it gives freedom to the people of America, and it ensures everybody can believe in anything or religion you want. This gave people new ideas and gave them the ability to go look for adventure.

Last but not least, the preamble says, "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This means to secure the safety of the citizens. It defines the freedom of America and the people that live here. To me, it means to give all life a chance, no matter the heritage or skin tone. In my opinion, it means to live with something to look forward to, and to always make sure your freedom is yours and to always keep your faith in America. It means to never let anybody else's opinions dawn on you just because they pretend to be better than you. It is to stand up for one another, and just because we may not all look the same, we can all still unite to make a difference in America.

The Declaration of Independence has influenced me by encouraging me to speak out for what I believe, to treat all people equally, to live for America, and to always remember that you may never know what someone else has been through, but to keep in mind that you can always stand by their side and be their friend. It helps me to keep in mind all the people that risked their lives to help save America. To wrap it all up, I would like to end with the quote that has inspired me most. "My hands may shake, but my heart does not."



Kyliaana “Kylie” Snell

Honorable Mention, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 13, Ms. Brittany Spencer

The Declaration of Independence is important to the United States of America because without it we would not have the freedom that we have today. Thomas Jefferson created this document with the intention of everyone being treated the same. There are so many ways that the Declaration of Independence is important and here are some of the ways.

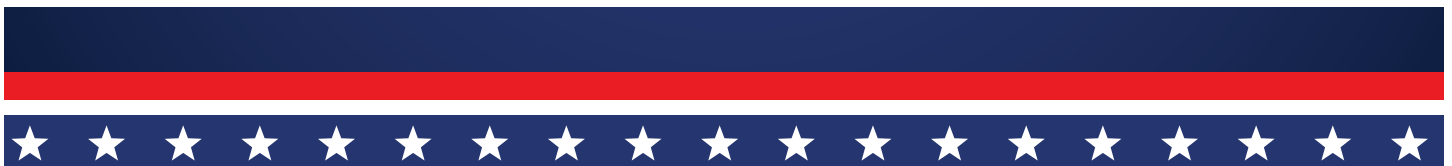
First of all, all men are created equal and treated the same. We all have a right to be us and express ourselves the way we want. Without the Declaration of Independence, we would not have a say in anything that we want to do and could be punished if the king did not agree with what was being done. I think that it is so important to treat people equally because everyone is important and should have a choice. A lot of African Americans and Hispanics were treated very poorly as slaves. The Declaration of Independence allowed them their freedom.

Then, endowed by our Creator means to follow and listen to God. Back in 1776, King George was in full control of what a person is allowed to do. Those that did not believe what King George believed were beheaded. The Declaration of Independence allowed people to believe and follow any religion or God without fear of punishment. Now in 2026, there are many different religions and beliefs and we are all free to believe in what we want to believe in without fear.

Third, is that the Declaration of Independence created inalienable rights. Inalienable means something that can't be taken away. Therefore, the Declaration of Independence made it so that Americans have rights and these rights can't be taken away. The king had full control and you had to do what he wanted. It doesn't matter who you are or what you look like, you have the same rights as others. This especially made a difference for African Americans and Hispanics allowing them the same rights and a future as white people. In 2026, we have come a long way on individual rights.

Finally, life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. In the Declaration of Independence, we get to choose the path we want to take. No one can take our freedom away and we are allowed to live the life that we choose, and not have it chosen for us. We no longer have to worry about the king choosing for us our religion, how we express ourselves, our job, and other freedoms. We should all feel lucky that we now have the right to choose our path and future.

Over all, because of the Declaration of Independence we can experience a better life for all Americans. The Declaration of Independence is one of the most important documents to the United States of America. Without the Declaration of Independence what would the U.S.A. be today?



Alexa “Alix” Childers

Honorable Mention, Middle School

Connect Charter School, age 13, Ms. Woodworth

What does it mean, “We the people?” It could mean many things. It could mean freedom for all or it could mean everyone is equal. Everyone has thought of these words once in their life. I have, and I think they mean everyone is the same. It means all the states have the same people, the same power, and are treated the same.

“All men are created equal.” This means many, many things. People believe it falls for everyone; whites, blacks, men, women, children, and adults. Others believe the opposite. I think it’s straightforward. Everyone is the same, no matter what. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.” There have been other people like him who have fought to get others to be treated as equals. For example, Dorothea Dix fought to have people with mental illness be treated kindly, like how others who didn’t have a mental illness were treated. Being “endowed by the creator with certain inalienable rights” means the creator, whoever they may be, made us all the same. Everyone has the same chemicals: 62 percent water, 16 percent protein, 65 percent oxygen, and 57.5 percent other chemicals. Everybody is different. Even if people see others as “different,” they aren’t. When the founding fathers wrote, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” they were talking about what America should be: full of life, freedom, and happiness. We have life and liberty, but what about happiness? We have gone to war multiple times, have had a Great Depression, and have gone to war with each other. The American Revolution was fought for our freedom, and our happiness, so why not fill in all the boxes on what they wanted in a country. I think in order to make sure “all men are created equal. .. endowed by the creator with certain inalienable rights... life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” we should make sure everyone is happy, full, and with a

roof over their head.

Those parts have majorly impacted America in their own ways though.

They’ve stopped segregation and made America what it is now, but have also made me realize something. Many people ignore the Declaration of Independence, toss it aside, just to keep their opinions. Most people don’t look back on it very often, but they should. People may not notice this but inflation has gotten better but not by much, medical insurance is expensive and multiple people are left in homelessness and hunger. This isn’t what the founding fathers would think would happen after they won their freedom for us. It has also made me realize that it hasn’t fully been used or fulfilled. Some people aren’t happy, and some people are: Some people aren’t supportive and others are, and some people are safe and some people aren’t. Yes, this is what makes America unique, but it can also make it toxic. I think the most important impact is how it’s created unity with all the states.

Before the declaration was made, all of the 13 colonies had different opinions about whether to be a union or separate. That was after the American Revolution and before the Constitutional Convention. Now, all the states are together, made a democracy, with little imperfections. I believe, strongly, that people should look back and realize why the U.S. Constitution was made; to make sure everyone was equal, happy, and healthy.

All in all, the preamble to the Declaration of Independence is very important, making major impacts and helping me realize things about how

America is now. Yes, it has little bits that could be fixed, but that takes time and not all countries are perfect.



Abraham Campos

1st Place, High School

Pueblo West High School, age 15, LTC Edmond

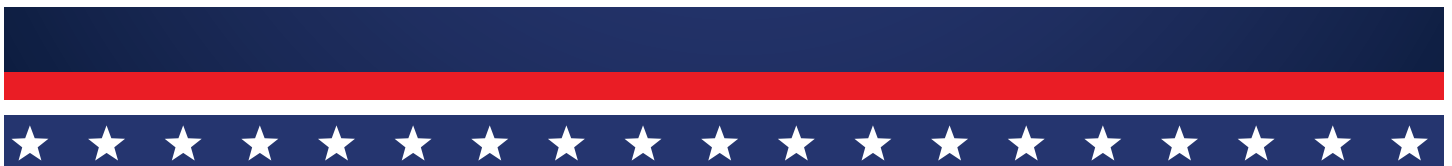
The Preamble to the United States Declaration of Independence includes the most important and influential American historical statements. Thomas Jefferson wrote the 1776 statement which asserts “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal that their Creator endows them with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” The words explain fundamental principles which exist between two extreme positions about human equality and human rights as they demonstrate the governmental systems which need to be implemented by states. I interpret the two statements as separate from each other because they present me with both motivational aspects and present-day difficulties. American freedom and justice emerged from historical events which established their foundation and their connection to current United States developments remains intact until today.

The Preamble states that “all men are created equal,” which means that I understand every person possesses equal worth as a human being. The statement made during that period represented a complete transformation of social norms. Many societies maintained their governance systems through the use of fixed social classes and royal rule and hereditary authority. The founders established equality as their fundamental principle, which they used to demonstrate that no one had superior status because of their birth. The ideal of equality existed in 1776 because people did not yet understand that all human beings deserved equal treatment. Enslaved Africans, Native Americans, and women did not receive equal treatment. The phrase functioned as a guiding principle because it was not yet fully developed into a complete reality. Americans have defined equality through constitutional amendments and

social movements throughout their history. The country has fulfilled its original promise through its work to end slavery and provide women with voting rights and safeguard civil rights during the Civil Rights Movement.

The principle that people possess Rights which their Creator has given them as permanent rights exists since the Creator established human rights. The rights which people possess do not originate from kings or lawmakers or constitutions because these rights exist as fundamental aspects of human nature. Enlightenment thinkers who followed John Locke created this belief system, which holds that all human beings possess natural rights because they are human. The concept exists to show that human dignity holds important value. The government should operate with restricted authority because laws exist to maintain individual rights instead of limiting them. The principle established the framework, which resulted in the United States Constitution and the United States Bill of Rights that protect individual rights.

The rights which government grant to citizens through the declaration of “Life Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” have shaped American society. The term “Life” protects individuals who need to defend their physical integrity. The term “Liberty” enables people to escape oppressive reign which lets them select their personal beliefs and professional choices, and daily activities. The “pursuit of Happiness” is especially meaningful to me because it recognizes that people have the freedom to seek fulfillment and purpose in their own unique ways. The system enables people to achieve their objectives through rights which it provides, yet their actual happiness exists beyond their current state. The American society developed this concept which enables people to pursue their personal goals while



they work toward technological progress through their independent choices.

The principles create powerful effects which bring about significant changes that affect our country. The colonists used these principles to establish their right to form a government which depended on popular consent rather than royal power. Throughout history social change leaders and activists have used these words to support their work. The Civil Rights Movement saw Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. use the Declaration's promise of equality to remind the public about the nation's commitment to equality. The Preamble's principles serve as a benchmark which the nation uses to assess its historical progress.

The ongoing work to achieve equality while protecting rights shows that these words maintain their current importance. The Declaration's principles serve as a primary reference point for public debates about civil rights

and voting rights, religious freedom, and legal equality. The Preamble functions as a fundamental base for the government while also serving as a display of national values. The document establishes national principles while measuring our progress in practicing those principles.

The Declaration of Independence Preamble establishes enduring principles which define both equal rights and natural human rights. The United States has not consistently achieved these principles yet they have shaped national progress while motivating people to fight for justice and bring about change. American national identity exists at its core through the statement "all men are created equal" which includes the protection of "Life Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The need for justice and equality in society requires new generations to commit to its accomplishment.



McKenze Berkley

2nd Place, High School

Rye High School, age 15, Mr. Estes

The words “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” were written and published into the Declaration of Independence in 1776. These words have helped build our country and have a more important meaning than you may think. Let’s break it down.

Let’s start with the words, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” In simpler terms, it is obvious that everyone was made to be treated fairly. And no one should be treated differently based on race, gender, etc. Which may seem like common sense, but if there is one thing that we must learn from our past, it is that not everyone has always been treated fairly. Over the course of our history, figures like MLK have had no choice but to speak up about the unfairness in this country. Surely, this is exactly why we must remember the words, “all men are created equal,” and not treat others differently based on their physical appearance, but rather their character.

To add on, the words “that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights,” has an essential meaning to it as well. In other words, before we were even born, God already had a plan and a purpose for our lives. Meaning that our rights were given to us by Him, no other higher power has more authority over us than He does. God made us all equally and in His image. To Him, we’re all sinners, so why would it be okay to treat someone differently when God sees us all as equal. This is my personal interpretation of these words, not everyone has to agree with my opinion, these are just my thoughts. Overall, we all have

been made equal before we were brought into this world, and we’re all given the same God given rights that no one can take away.

Lastly, “that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Meaning that every individual is entitled to these rights ... Life, or the right to exist Liberty, being able to have your own thoughts and opinions while being able to speak your mind. And the pursuit of happiness, being able to seek your own goals and fulfillments. Part of being an American citizen is having these rights no matter who you are. And most importantly we are able to have these rights because of the men and women who have fought or are currently fighting for this country. All in all, everyone has the right to live, be free, and pursue one’s happiness because of these words spoken in the Declaration of Independence.

Thanks to the words, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” for setting the boundary of right from wrong. The Declaration of Independence clearly states that everyone has been made equal and with the same rights. Meaning that no person should be treated differently based on status, race, or gender. And that we all have the right to live, be free, and have happiness, which is something that no one can take away. These tiny but mighty words have helped to shape our country into what it is today. Although the past might not look pretty, it’s helped us to learn from past mistakes so that we can become stronger together and as one.



Cora Marmolejo

3rd Place, High School

Pueblo West High School, age 17, LTC Edmond

The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence contains some of the most important words in American history. When Thomas Jefferson wrote, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” he was saying that equality is a basic truth. It is not something that needs to be argued or proven. To me, this means that every person is born with the same value. No one is naturally better than anyone else. It does not matter what someone looks like, where they come from, how much money they have, or what they believe. Everyone deserves respect and the same basic rights. Even though the country did not fully follow this idea at the beginning, since slavery still existed and women could not vote, those words set a goal for the nation. They gave people something to fight for. Over time, Americans used this idea of equality to challenge unfair laws and demand change. The Civil War, the women’s suffrage movement, and the Civil Rights Movement were all influenced by this belief that people are supposed to be equal. Because of this, the statement has had a powerful and lasting effect on our country. The next part says that people are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” This means that our rights are given to us simply because we are human. They are not handed to us by the government, and they cannot just be taken away. The word “unalienable” means they cannot be removed. To me, this idea is very important because it limits the government’s power. If rights came from the government, then the government could decide who deserves them. But the Declaration says our rights come from something higher, which means every person has them automatically. This idea shaped the way our government was created. The Constitution and Bill of Rights were written to protect people’s freedoms. The government’s job is not to control people’s lives completely, but to protect their rights. When the government fails to do that, the people have the right to speak up and demand change. This belief has influenced many court decisions and laws throughout American

history. The rights listed in the Preamble are “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Life means that everyone has the right to live safely and not be harmed without reason. Liberty means freedom. This includes freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom to make personal choices. The pursuit of happiness means that people have the chance to follow their dreams and build a life that makes them happy. It does not promise success or wealth, but it promises opportunity. To me, the pursuit of happiness is one of the most meaningful parts. It shows that America was founded on the idea of opportunity. People come to this country hoping for a better life. They believe they will have the freedom to work hard, set goals, and create their own future. This idea has helped shape the American Dream, which is the belief that anyone can succeed if they are willing to put in the effort. The effect of these statements on our country has been enormous. They inspired the American Revolution and the creation of a new government based on freedom instead of control by a king. They have also inspired other countries around the world to fight for independence and equal rights. At the same time, these words have challenged America to improve. When the country has fallen short of its ideals, people have pointed back to the Declaration and said, “We are supposed to be equal.” Even today, these ideas still matter. People continue to debate what equality and freedom mean in modern times. Court cases, protests, and new laws often connect back to the basic principles found in the Preamble. It reminds us that America is built on strong values, even if we are still working to fully live up to them. In my opinion, the underlined statements in the Preamble are both a promise and a responsibility. They promise that everyone has value and rights. They also remind us that it is our responsibility to protect those rights—not just for ourselves, but for others too. These words are more than just part of a history lesson. They are the foundation of our country and continue to guide us today.



Jeanette Adame-Hernandez

Honorable Mention, High School

East High School, age 17, Mr. Raymond LeMasters

One of America's greatest accomplishments was breaking free from the rule of the British government and justifying the grievances against King George III and declaring the colonies as free states. It asserted universal rights to life, liberty and happiness. Tensions over the British policies led the continental congress to seek independence. America's new government was labeled a Democracy and the country was later to be known as the United States of America.

There were five people apart of the committee Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Sherman, and Livingston, Thomas Jefferson was the main author. Finally in July 1776, the official new status of the colonies was announced. The preamble to the declaration of independence shows the nation's values and what the country stands for. Words from the Preamble that stand out to me are from the ending of it that state "that among these are life liberty and the pursuit of happiness".

Those specific words are what really explain the country's values, it represents what people need in order to live freely, that everyone deserves safety and protection. They also influenced other movements for the country, such as the bill of rights and the constitution; it led the path for rights and governance. The declaration as a whole, provided a philosophical and legal basis for the revolution, highlighting the specific abuses by the king to justify separation. It outlined the powerful ideals that inspired the values, the values

of America that resonate with equality and liberty, it also showed a call globally against tyranny. It set down principles of natural rights for future generations as well. The preamble as a whole, lets one know that every person is born with equal rights that will stay and also early ideas of freedom and equality. It set a belief that no matter your status, everyone deserves basic respect. At the time slavery was still around so the ideas were not followed, but I believe that it built that path for future generations and change. Major movements were motivated by the statements made such as the idea of equality to argue against slavery, women's rights to vote. Segregation and discrimination was something that was also brought to an end when civil rights leaders used it as well. In general, they are words used in this country to fight for equality and justice. The words have and will continue to protect and expand freedom for everyone. I'm very grateful to have been born and raised here, especially knowing in other countries freedom and equality is very limited. However, in this current political climate I get worried more and more of our rights and benefits will be taken. Listening to others experiences, I've learned over the years that having these rights are a privilege, but no matter what the country, I also believe that basic human rights should not be in a argument of whether or not they should be given or taken away because everyone deserves them and deserves the right to be treated equal.



Malcolm Cummings

Honorable Mention, High School

Pueblo West High School, age 17, LTC Emond

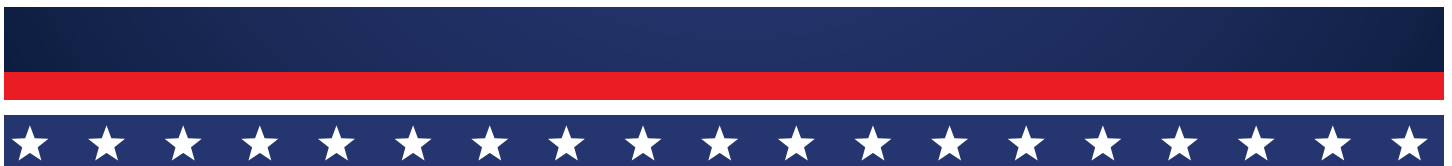
The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence is iconic for its simple yet powerful message, in the declaration of inalienable rights for all people. This idea was also behind the Bill of Rights, which is fundamental to our nation and to each individual living in it, because it enshrined the rights mentioned in the Preamble. The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence laid out the foundation for what our country was to later stand for, after the war for independence when our government was created in the form it's in today.

The First and Second Amendments are summoned to my mind when hearing the phrase “that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights”, because those two amendments are the most personally important to me, even though the entire Bill of Rights is held in high regard in my mind, as they grant me the rights I enjoy every day and take for granted. The First Amendment protects the right to freedom of speech, and freedom to exercise religion, without which this great country would not be what it is, and the Second Amendment gives each individual the right to defend themselves, their property; and most importantly their loved ones. Also referenced in the aforementioned excerpt from the Preamble is a Creator, which holds specific meaning to my Christian faith and upbringing, as it did to many of the Founding Fathers who wrote the Constitution and the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence. They recognize that the rights they would later set forth in the Constitution are not only fundamental for freedom

and for our country, but are given to us by default simply for existing, and are absolutely necessary to a truly free people.

Even though the words our Founding Fathers used in writing the Preamble claimed freedom to all, and gave the famous statement “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” these rights still took a long time to truly apply to everyone equally in the United States, even after the Bill of Rights was set forth. Slavery was not outlawed for nearly eighty years after the Constitution was ratified, and just under ninety years after the Declaration of Independence was signed. Even still, discrimination was still largely allowed in the United States for over a century, only truly ending legally in 1968, barely shy of two hundred years after the Declaration of Independence. The Preamble still helped pave the way for rights truly being recognized as universal, for all United States citizens, and its influence still has yet to die today as individual rights are constantly being challenged in one way or another even in our present day and age.

The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence is still relevant today, because it reminds us about the freedom and principles this entire great nation, the United States of America, was founded on, and still stands for today two hundred and fifty years later. It reminds each of us of the rights we take for granted every day, that most people in the world do not enjoy as Americans do.



Audrianna Juanes

Honorable Mention, High School

Pueblo West High School, age 16, LTC Emond

The Declaration of Independence is a document that has a significant role in American history because it explains the reasons for the colonies breaking away from Great Britain. At the beginning of the Declaration of Independence, the authors stated, "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." (Jefferson, 1776). The Declaration sets forth many of the principles of government that the colonists desired to establish in their new country. To me, these principles are about fairness, freedom, and respect for each individual's rights - and they are still very much part of what America stands for today.

The phrase that all men are equally created is truly impactful because it was said that everyone was created equal. A lot of people during this time believed that because of a person's place in life (socially), whether it was royalty or upper-class status, they had the most power over everyone else. However, the colonists made it known that everyone is equal to each other and rejected that idea. To me, that means that

everyone is entitled to be treated fairly regardless of wealth, status, race, or whatever. While this idea was ultimately not implemented as all people did not have equal rights immediately following the Declaration of Independence; i.e., women, slaves and Native Americans were not considered to have equal rights right away, it did provide a goal for our country to strive for. Over many years, this idea of equality would inspire movements to abolish slavery, women's rights and civil rights as each of these causes was evolved as a result of the principles put forth in the Declaration of Independence.

According to the phrase "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights," inalienable rights cannot be revoked by anyone, including kings or governments. Although they stem from the qualities of humanity and should be respected and protected by governments, the safeguards are not dependent on a king or government granting them. It seems to me that these rights should always be afforded the same level of protection no matter who the government is. This was a major reason why this concept became so important; it restricted governmental authority and



allowed for the establishment of a government that values individual freedom. Furthermore, from the inception of the U.S., it has been the underpinning foundation to establish inalienable rights in our laws and Constitution, including the Bill of Rights, as well as continuing to ensure that citizens maintain the same rights, including the right to express their views, to practice their religion freely, and to feel safe and secure, regardless of the leaders in power.

The Preamble talks about, among other things, the three most essential rights to an individual, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” A person’s right to life is upheld by the government’s responsibility to protect people from being harmed. Liberty means that persons have the freedom to speak their minds, practice religious beliefs, and make personal decisions regarding their lifestyle. The pursuit of happiness is the right of every person to seek a fulfilling life as long as no one else gets hurt. In my mind, those three ideals show that the Government’s purpose is to provide an environment where citizens can live free and safe

instead of having control over every aspect of their citizens’ lives. To date, the three ideals have been the basis for laws and court rulings in the United States, and they still shape how the Government is expected to treat its citizens today.

Ultimately, the two lines that are consistently referenced in the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence define the very basis of the ideals found within our nation. In my eyes, these phrases refer to equal, free and common human rights for all persons regardless of race, sex, ethnicity, or religion. Throughout the history of the United States, we have made numerous attempts to live by these standards but have fallen short many times; even so, these phrases have universally provided a reference for creating much of the fundamental and expansive social/legally defined social change that has shaped our nation from the abolition of slavery and from the civil rights movements, still today they define who we are as a country and remind us to continually seek the protection of rights for every human being.



