

Thomas Paine's Common Sense: A Primary Sources Analysis Activity

Primary sources are first hand accounts of an event or situation in history. These accounts can be verbal (a quote, journal, or other written piece) or they may be visual (an image, sign, video...). The person providing the information in the account actually **lived through** and **experienced** the history. This makes primary sources very important for **understanding** history. Still, you must consider the source, its **relevance for the time period**, the **reliability** of the account, and any **bias** that may be held by the person providing the information.

Common Sense

Introduction

By Thomas Paine

PERHAPS the sentiments contained in the following pages, are not yet sufficiently fashionable to procure them general favor; a long habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it a superficial appearance of being right, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defense of custom. But tumult soon subsides. Time makes more converts than reason.

As a long and violent abuse of power is generally the means of calling the right of it in question, (and in matters too which might never have been thought of, had not the sufferers been aggravated into the inquiry,) and as the king of England hath undertaken in his own right, to support the parliament in what he calls theirs, and as the good people of this country are grievously oppressed by the combination, they have an undoubted privilege to inquire into the pretensions of both, and equally to reject the usurpations of either.

In the following sheets, the author hath studiously avoided every thing which is personal among ourselves. Compliments as well as censure to individuals make no part thereof. The wise and the worthy need not the triumph of a pamphlet; and those whose sentiments are injudicious or unfriendly, will cease of themselves, unless too much pains is bestowed upon their conversion.

The cause of America is, in a great measure, the cause of all mankind. Many circumstances have, and will arise, which are not local, but universal, and through which the principles of all lovers of mankind are affected, and in the event of which, their affections are interested. The laying a country desolate with fire and sword, declaring war against the natural rights of all mankind, and extirpating the defenders thereof from the face of the earth, is the concern of every man to whom nature hath given the power of feeling; of which class, regardless of party censure, is.

THE AUTHOR.

Philadelphia, Feb. 14, 1776.

Questions for Analysis:

1. Who created this document? When was it created?
2. What was the purpose of this document? Who is his audience?
3. What wrongs are addressed by the author? Who is responsible for those wrongs?
4. What does the author encourage in the final paragraph of this introduction?
5. If you were to write a similar statement today, what issues would you discuss? Explain your response.

FACT: Thomas Paine wrote this statement in common language for the common American. His thorough evaluation of the British crown made many valid points, and was the first to call for independence from Great Britain.