

Activity One: American Independence

Student Worksheet

Student Name _____ Date _____

[Directions]

Step One. Read the selection below from *Common Sense* and then answer the questions immediately below the selections

Common Sense (taken from paragraphs 17 and 21-24 of the section titled “Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs.”).

1. “I challenge the warmest advocate for reconciliation to show a single advantage that this continent can reap by being connected with Great Britain. I repeat the challenge; not a single advantage is derived. . .
2. Though I would carefully avoid giving unnecessary offence, yet I am inclined to believe, that all those who espouse the doctrine of reconciliation, may be included within the following descriptions.
3. Interested men, who are not to be trusted, weak men who CANNOT see, prejudiced men who will not see, and a certain set of moderate men who think better of the European world than it deserves; and this last class, by an ill-judged deliberation, will be the cause of more calamities to this Continent than all the other three.
4. It is the good fortune of many to live distant from the scene of present sorrow; the evil is not sufficiently brought to their doors to make them feel the precariousness with which all American property is possessed. But let our imaginations transport us a few moments to Boston; that seat of wretchedness will teach us wisdom, and instruct us forever to renounce a power in whom we can have no trust. The inhabitants of that unfortunate city, who but a few months ago were in ease and affluence, have now no other alternative than to stay and starve, or turn out to beg. Endangered by the fire of their friends if they continue within the city and plundered by the soldiery if they leave it, in their present situation they are prisoners without the hope of redemption, and in a general attack for their relief they would be exposed to the fury of both armies.
5. Men of passive tempers look somewhat lightly over the offences of Great Britain, and, still hoping for the best, are apt to call out, “Come, come, we shall be friends again for all this.” But examine the passions and feelings of mankind: bring the doctrine of reconciliation to the touchstone of nature, and then tell me whether you can hereafter love, honour, and faithfully serve the power that hath carried fire and sword into your land? If you cannot do all these, then you are only deceiving yourselves, and by your delay bringing ruin upon posterity. Your future connection with Britain, whom you can neither love nor honour, will be forced and unnatural, and being formed only on the plan of present convenience, will in a little time fall

into a relapse more wretched than the first. But if you say, you can still pass the violations over, then I ask, hath your house been burnt? Hath your property been destroyed before your face? Are your wife and children destitute of a bed to lie on, or bread to live on? Have you lost a parent or a child by their hands, and yourself the ruined and wretched survivor? If you have not, then are you not a judge of those who have. But if you have, and can still shake hands with the murderers, then are you unworthy the name of husband, father, friend or lover, and whatever may be your rank or title in life, you have the heart of a coward, and the spirit of a sycophant. . .

6. O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia, and Africa, have long expelled her. —Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.”

Questions about the selection from *Common Sense*

1) Paragraphs 2 and 3

According to Paine, what kinds of people “espouse the doctrine of reconciliation” with England? What does Paine’s language tell you about how he feels about these people?

2) Paragraph 4

How does Paine describe life in Boston, and why does he think the situation there shows that England should not be government the colonies?

3) Paragraph 5

How does Paine describe those who would reconcile with Great Britain? What does his description of them tell you about his attitude toward them?

What questions does Paine have for those who would reconcile with England? Why does Paine think reconciliation is impossible?

4) Paragraph 6

Who, in this paragraph is the “fugitive,” who must receive or take in that “fugitive,” and why must that fugitive be received?

How does Paine link the fate of America with the fate of the world? What role does Paine assign to America?
