

The Golden Core: Framing America's Founding Ideals

Option A

Lexile: 1070
Word Count: 658

Adapted from: <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/essays/background-essay-an-apple-of-gold-in-a-picture-of-silver-the-declaration-of-independence-and-the-u-s-constitution>

Vocabulary

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|---------------|-------------------|--------------|------------|
| ▶ unalienable | ▶ self-government | ▶ tyrannical | ▶ preamble |
| ▶ tranquility | ▶ self-evident | ▶ bruise | ▶ founding |
| ▶ endow | ▶ peacefully | | |

In 1861, President Abraham Lincoln wrote a short reflection on America's Founding principles. Using a biblical metaphor, he said the Declaration of Independence was an "apple of gold" because it contained the core ideas, or Founding principles, of the new country. The Constitution was a "picture of silver," or a frame around the apple that created the structure of government. In Lincoln's mind—and in those of the Founders—the two documents both worked together to make a free government.

At first glance, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution seem to have different purposes. The Declaration announced that the colonies were free from England. It also stated the Founding principles of natural rights and popular sovereignty—the idea that government gets its power from the people. The Constitution, on the other hand, created the structure of the national government, dividing it into three branches with different powers. However, a closer reading of the Declaration of Independence and the Preamble to the Constitution shows that both are based on the same Founding principles.

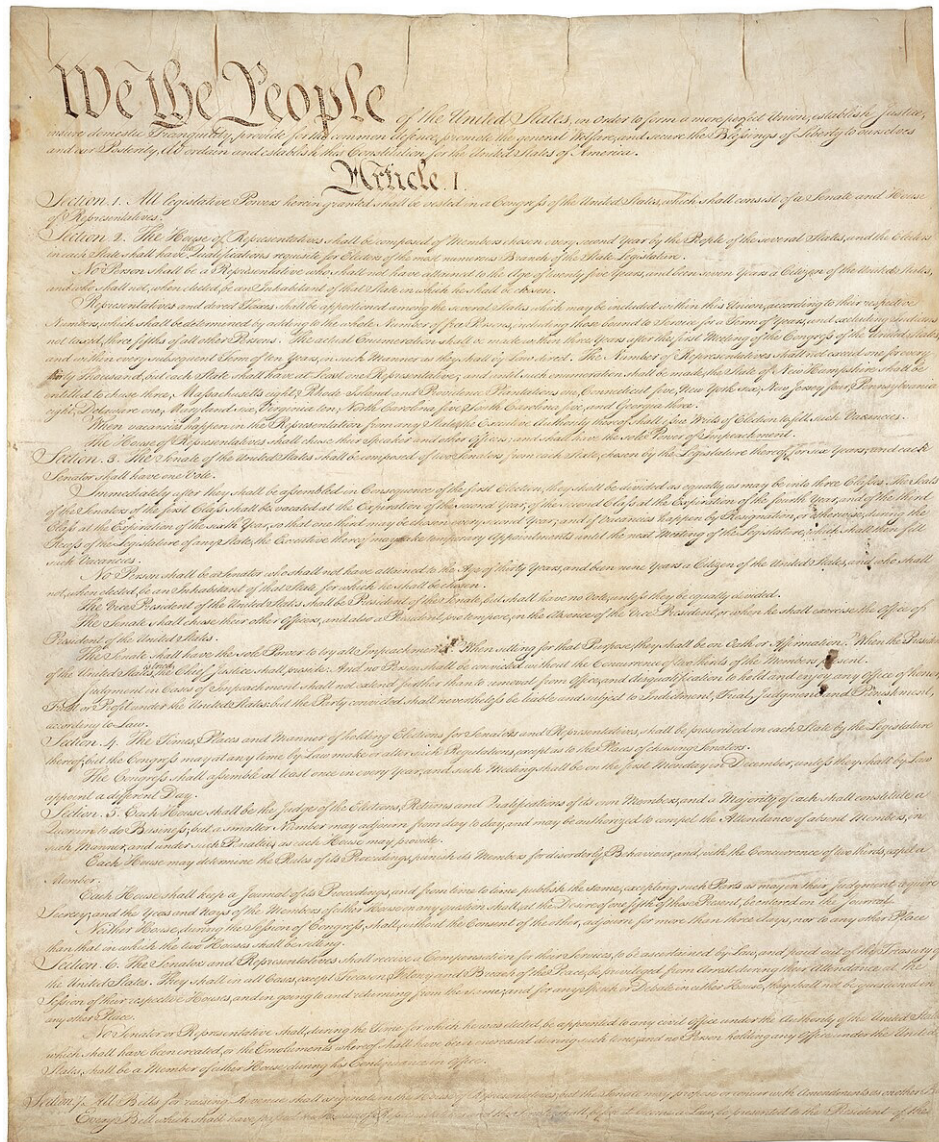
Popular Sovereignty: "We the People"

The Declaration of Independence stated the principle of popular sovereignty. This means that the people are the true source of power in a representative government. The people give their consent to their elected representatives to govern them. The Declaration stated, "That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

The Preamble to the Constitution also emphasized this idea. It began with the words, "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union." This meant that the people, through their representatives, created the new government.

Justice and Equality: "Establish Justice"

The Declaration of Independence called for a government that recognized human equality and protected people's natural rights. It declared, "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 meant that the equality of all people should be the foundation of American government. This promise, though not fully realized, has guided American political debates ever since.



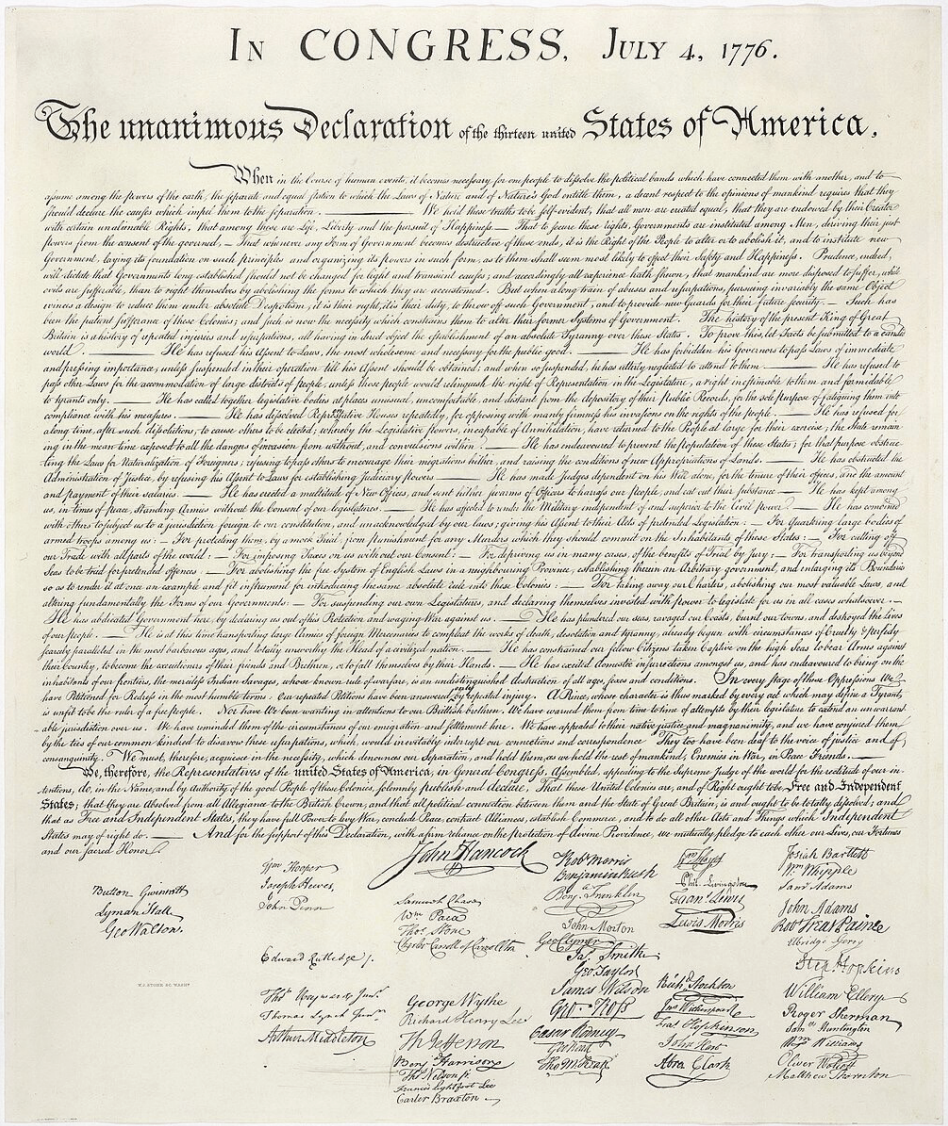
Constitutional Convention. Constitution of the United States. September 17, 1787. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. Wikimedia Commons. Last modified January 1, 2010. Image. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Constitution_of_the_United_States_page_1.jpg

The image showcases the original handwritten text of the Constitution of the United States, beginning with the iconic Preamble: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union..." It also includes Article I, which establishes the structure and powers of the legislative branch, defining the roles of the Senate and House of Representatives.

The Constitution’s Preamble echoed this idea by stating one of its main goals was to “establish Justice.” Justice meant that all people are equal under the law and have the same rights. It also meant individuals had the freedom to pursue happiness, have the equal opportunity to work, and keep what they earned.

Rule of Law: “Insure Domestic Tranquility”

The Declaration supported the principle of the rule of law. This means that both government leaders and citizens all follow the same laws, no matter how much power they have. The Declaration said that if the government became tyrannical, the people



Second Continental Congress. *United States Declaration of Independence*. July 4, 1776. Facsimile reproduction by William Stone, 1823. Wikimedia Commons. Image. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:United_States_Declaration_of_Independence.jpg.

This high-resolution image is a facsimile of the *Declaration of Independence*, originally ratified on July 4, 1776, and engraved by William Stone in 1823. It preserves the powerful words that proclaimed America's independence and outlined its foundational principles.

had the power to overthrow it but also had a responsibility 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.” The rule of law allowed citizens to live their lives peacefully and society to function normally.

Likewise, the Preamble stated that the new government would “insure domestic Tranquility.” This meant keeping peace within the country. To do this, the Framers gave the executive branch enough power to enforce laws and uphold the principle of the rule of law.

Civic Virtue

The principles in the Declaration of Independence informed the creation of the new government under the Constitution. Together, these documents guided the nation’s government and protected liberty. Although these principles shaped the structure of the government, it was ultimately up to the people to maintain them. The Founders believed that success of republican self-government depended on the civic virtue of the people. Citizens had to take responsibility for maintaining these principles. As Lincoln wrote in his “apple of gold” reflection, “So let us act, that neither picture, or apple shall ever be blurred, or bruised or broken.”



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Option B

Lexile: 900
Word Count: 566

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Vocabulary

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|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------|
| ▶ unalienable | ▶ tranquility | ▶ self-evident | ▶ bruise |
| ▶ founding | ▶ endow | ▶ institute | ▶ blur |
| ▶ insure | ▶ fairness | | |

The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution

In 1861, President Abraham Lincoln wrote about America's founding ideas. He used a picture to explain them. He said the Declaration of Independence was like an "apple of gold" because it had the most important ideas of the new country. The Constitution was like a "picture of silver" because it created the government to protect those ideas. Lincoln—and the Founders—believed both documents worked together to create a free country.

When you first look at them, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution may seem different. The Declaration said the American colonies were free from England. It also said that people have natural rights, and that government gets its power from the people. The Constitution set up the national government with three branches, each with different powers. But when we read both documents closely, we see they share the same important ideas.

The Power of the People: "We the People"

The Declaration of Independence said that the people have power in government. This idea is called popular sovereignty. It means people choose their leaders and give them permission to make decisions. The Declaration said, "That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." In other words, government gets its power from the people.

The Constitution also showed this idea in its first words: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union." This meant the people created the government.

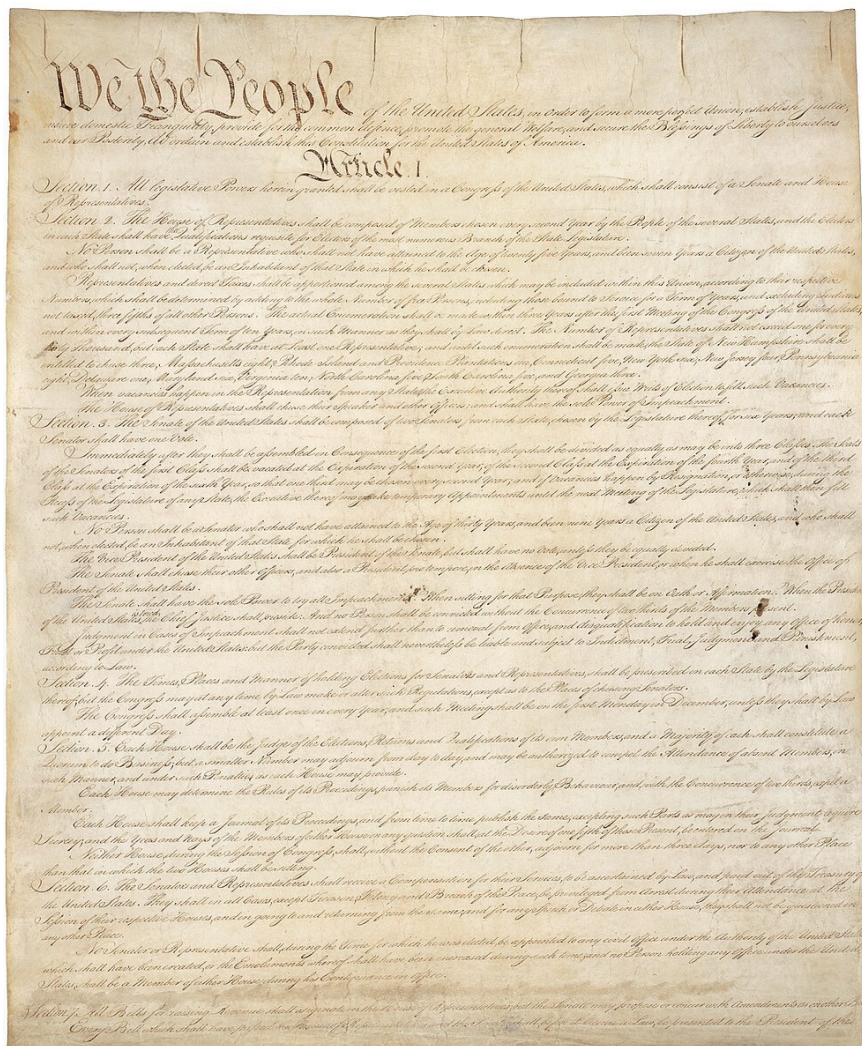
Justice and Equality: “Establish Justice”

The Declaration of Independence said all people are equal and have rights. It said, “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 means all people have rights that cannot be taken away. Even though this was not true for everyone at the time, this idea has shaped American history.

The Constitution also talked about fairness. The Preamble said one goal was to “establish Justice.” This meant the law should be fair to everyone. It also meant people should have the chance to work hard and earn a good life.

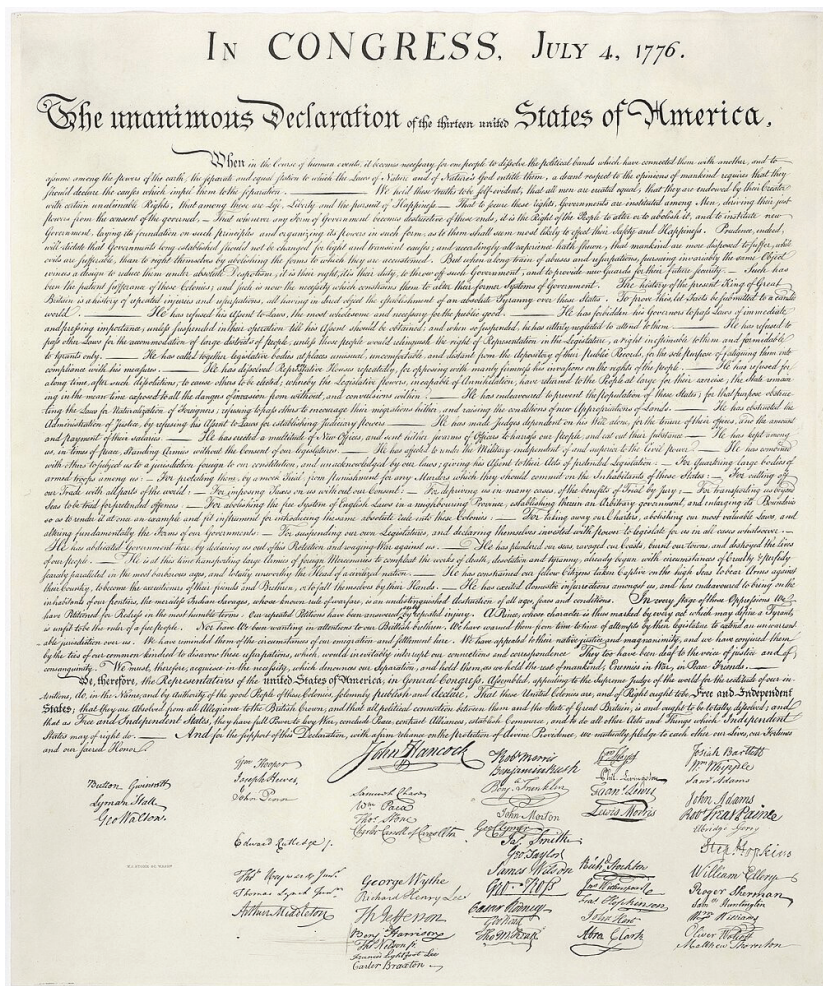
The Rule of Law: “Insure Domestic Tranquility”

The Declaration of Independence supported the rule of law. This means that everyone—leaders and citizens—must follow the same laws. It also said that if a government became unfair, the people could change it. But they also had a duty to build a better government that would keep them safe and happy.



Constitutional Convention.
Constitution of the United States.
September 17, 1787. U.S. National
Archives and Records Administration.
Wikimedia Commons. Last modified
January 1, 2010. Image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Constitution_of_the_United_States,_page_1.jpg

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The Constitution promised to “insure domestic Tranquility.” This means keeping peace in the country. To do this, the government had to make sure laws were followed fairly. The Constitution gave the president the power to enforce laws.

Being Good Citizens

The ideas in the Declaration of Independence helped shape the government in the Constitution. These ideas guided the country and protected freedom. But the Founders believed the people had to help keep these ideas alive. People needed to be good citizens and take care of their country.

Lincoln wrote that both the “apple of gold” (the Declaration) and the “picture of silver” (the Constitution) were important. He said, “So let us act, that neither picture, or apple shall ever be blurred, or bruised or broken.” This means it is up to us to protect these ideas for the future.