

Thomas Paine's Common Sense - Comprehension & Analysis Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructions: Read each question carefully and write your answer in the space provided. Use evidence from the text or your class notes to support your responses.

1. On what date was Common Sense first published, and who wrote it?
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2. Name the THREE main arguments Paine makes in Common Sense.
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3. Paine uses the Bible to argue against monarchy. Which Old Testament story does he cite to show that kingship is against God's will?
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4. What does Paine mean when he calls the king 'the Royal Brute of Britain'?
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5. Paine argues that being part of the British Empire actually HURTS colonial trade. Give ONE economic reason he provides.
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6. What form of government does Paine propose to replace British rule?
.....
7. Approximately how many copies of Common Sense were sold within a year of publication?
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8. How does Common Sense differ in tone and language from earlier colonial political writing? Give ONE specific difference.
.....
9. True or False: Paine was born in America. Explain your answer.
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10. In your own words, explain why Common Sense was historically significant beyond just the American Revolution.
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Answer Key

1. January 10, 1776; Thomas Paine.
2. 1) Monarchy is an unnatural and corrupt form of government. 2) Britain has no legitimate right to govern the colonies. 3) Immediate independence is necessary and achievable.
3. The story of Samuel and the Israelites demanding a king (1 Samuel 8), which Paine says God warned against.
4. He means the king acts like a tyrant - using brute force rather than reason or justice to govern - and deserves no loyalty.
5. Britain forced the colonies into trade wars with European nations that the colonies had no quarrel with, damaging commerce the colonies could otherwise conduct freely.

6. A democratic republic with a written constitution, elected representatives, and no hereditary monarchy.
7. Approximately 500,000 copies (some estimates range from 100,000 to 500,000 across all editions).
8. Paine wrote in plain, direct English aimed at ordinary colonists, avoiding the Latin phrases and legal jargon used by educated elites like John Adams or Thomas Jefferson.
9. False. Paine was born in Thetford, Norfolk, England in 1737 and emigrated to the colonies in 1774, just two years before writing Common Sense.
10. It demonstrated that political ideas could be communicated to a mass audience in plain language, influencing later democratic movements in France and beyond, and establishing a model for popular political writing.