

History and Literature

Common Sense

Thomas Paine’s stirring pamphlet, *Common Sense*, urged American colonists to declare independence from Britain. The pamphlet had a tremendous impact on public opinion. More than 500,000 copies were sold in six months.

Directions: *Read the following passages from Common Sense and answer the questions that follow.*

In almost every article of defense we abound [have plenty]. . . . Our iron is superior to that of other countries. Our small arms equal to any in the world. Cannon we can cast at pleasure. Saltpeter and gunpowder we are every day producing. Our knowledge is hourly improving. Resolution is our inherent character, and courage hath never forsaken us. . . . Why is it that we hesitate? From Britain we can expect nothing but ruin. If she once is admitted to the government of America again, this Continent will not be worth living in. Jealousies will be always arising; insurrections [uprisings] will be constantly happening, and who will go forth to quell [quiet] them? Who will venture his life to reduce his own countrymen to a foreign obedience? . . .

The infant state of the Colonies, as it is called, so far from being against, is an argument in favor of independence. We are sufficiently numerous, and were we more so, we might be less united. . . . [T]he reason is evident, for trade being the consequence [result] of population, men become too much absorbed thereby to attend to anything else. Commerce diminishes the spirit, both of patriotism and military defense. And history sufficiently informs us, that the bravest achievements were always accomplished in the nonage [youth] of a nation. . . . The more men have to lose, the less willing they are to venture.

1. What does Paine predict will happen if Britain continues to rule America?

2. What physical and human resources does Paine say America has?

3. **Draw Conclusions** Why does Paine urge Americans not to hesitate?
