

*This sample “believing and doubting” exercise could be used as a model in introducing the approach to students.*

The following text was excerpted from **“The Declaration of Independence”**:

When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and 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. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

Believing	Doubting
<p>-This first sentence is completely reasonable: in the case of a political separation of one group from another, the party making the separation should explain its reasoning.</p> <p>-Again, perhaps because I’ve heard this so many times, I find the opening assertion to be completely persuasive. The idea that we all have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness dictates that government’s role is to preserve these rights, for everyone. This may not always reflect reality, but it is a fine ideal to strive for.</p>	<p>-Looking at the first sentence again, I’m noticing that “dissolve” is a pretty mild term to use to talk about revolution.</p> <p>-Hmm. I’m not sure what is meant by the “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” endowing people with a right to “a separate and equal station” among “the powers of the earth.” Does this mean that nations are “natural” and divinely ordained?</p> <p>-This may be quibbling, but “inalienable” is a strange word to use in discussing rights that have been taken away. Also, doesn’t the government take away the right to life in sentencing criminals to death? And didn’t the colonies deprive African slaves of liberty and Native Americans of the right to pursue happiness?</p>