“The Declaration of Independence” Questions

Directions: Answer the questions thoroughly. Be prepared to discuss your answers. You will be writing a rhetorical analysis on the Dec. of Ind. Define the bold words on a separate sheet of paper.

1. The Declaration can be divided into five sections: the introduction, the preamble (explanation of purpose), the charges against George III, the criticism of the British people, and the conclusion. Note where each section begins and ends.

2. A cumulative or loose sentences adds its modifying elements after the subject, verb, and complement. A periodic sentence expresses its modifying elements first, reserving the main point until the end. The first paragraph of the Declaration consists of one lengthy sentence. Which type of sentence is it? Why is this type of sentence effective in this case?

3. Describe the tone of the first paragraph. Why do the authors avoid specifying the conflict between Britain and the Americans – referring instead to “one People” dissolving political ties with “another”? What is the antecedent of the pronouns “they” and “them”? Consider the implications of the words, “necessary” and “declare” as well as the diction related to humankind and spirituality. How does this opening paragraph convey the nature of the Americans’ motivation for independence?

4. Even though they were not specified, how and why does the first paragraph establish a clear separation between the Americans and the British?

5. The second section, the preamble (ending with “. . . their future Security.”), also does not specify the conflict between Britain and America. Describe the tone. Specify diction that helps create the tone and describe how those words affect the tone. Why don’t they mention the conflict yet?

6. In the first two sections, the only sentence written with a pronoun in first-person is the first sentence of section two, “We hold these Truths . . .” The rest of the sentences have third-person subject and objects. To whom does “we” refer? Why are the first two sections primarily written in third-person point of view.

7. In the second section, how does the Declaration specifically justify the abolishment of American ties with Britain?

8. The third section begins, “Such has been the patient Sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the Necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government.” How does this sentence provide a transition to the next section?

9. Note that the “Facts” against George the III were listed in a rather lengthy paragraph. Why would the authors of the Declaration feel the need to “prove this” by providing “Facts”? What is the antecedent of the pronoun “this”? What is meant by a “candid world”? Why do they introduce the grievances with a short periodic sentence? Why use passive voice, obscuring the subject? In other words, why not specify who is going to submit these “Facts”?

10. Loaded language is language with profound connotations, usually employed to evoke an emotional response from the audience, to appeal to pathos. Even though the authors of the Declaration were careful to avoid sounding overly emotional, they did incorporate some loaded diction into the document. For example, in grievance 24, the word “plunder” implied that the people “plundered” were helpless, overcome by an excessively powerful aggressor. Find other examples of diction you consider loaded. State why. Note examples of the three Aristotelian appeals in the document. Which type of appeal is most prominent? Why is reliance on this type important?
11. Notice the use of anaphora throughout the list of grievances, the repetition of “he has” and “for” at the beginning of successive sentences (or clauses). How does the parallel structure and repetition impact the effectiveness of the document?

12. The fourth section (beginning with “nor”) shifts the focus away from George III. How? To where does the focus shift?

13. How does the fourth section transition to the conclusion? What is the purpose of the conclusion? Discuss the unconventional use of capitalization throughout the document.

14. Even though the Declaration conveys arguments, it is essentially non-persuasive because it does not explicitly require anyone to act. If the document were persuasive, explain the differences. Would it be as effect?

15. The Declaration is an argument presented in the form of a deductive reasoning, where a conclusion is drawn from the premises, moving from the general to the specific. If parts 2 – 5 were expressed in the form of deductive argument, a syllogism, it might be expressed:

   **Major Premise:** When government designs to “reduce” its citizens 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.

   **Minor Premise:** The government of England has deliberately sought to “reduce” its citizens under “absolute Despotism.”

   **Conclusion:** Therefore, the American people have the right and duty