'Common Sense' by Thomas Paine (1737-1809)

Jefferson wasn't the only Thomas who wrote about independence. There was also Thomas Paine. He was born in England and lived there until 1774. In England he met Benjamin Franklin, who persuaded Paine to come to the Colonies. Paine came to America and found the place in a state of turmoil (disorder). He immediately became a Patriot. Paine was an excellent writer, so he decided to write about the situation in the Colonies. Some say what Paine wrote was propaganda (incorrect information spread to convince people it is true). In 1775, he wrote a pamphlet, or booklet, called "Common Sense." Paine wrote it in plain language that most people understood. He encouraged American independence from Britain. Thousands of colonists read it, and they asked for more and more printed copies. "Common Sense" said the Colonies were required to declare independence because the British government was evil. Many colonists loved what Paine said and his pamphlet became America's first bestseller. This was the mass media of the 1700s! Of course, there were Loyalists who strongly disagreed with it. Paine continued to write against British policies even though the king and his Loyalists hated it.

Was it really 'Common Sense'?

Is Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" what colonists hoped would prevail (succeed)? Think about it. How would you have felt at the time—loyal to your king, ready to declare independence or undecided? Should you listen to someone who wrote about wanting to go to war? Or should you keep paying taxes to a far-away country? If you were convicted of treason, you might be hanged. If you won your independence, you'd be free. What might happen if you didn't take either side? Write about your ideas.

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