

Book Club Questions for
The Elementary Common Sense
of Thomas Paine

1. In the beginning of *Common Sense*, Paine spends a lot of time setting the tone for the rest of the book by explaining the differences between a society and a government. What tone is Paine trying to set for the rest of the book? Try to summarize what his purpose is in establishing this difference.

2. In establishing the origins of kings, Paine believes there are only three ways kings could have come into being. Do you agree? Can you think of other circumstances where a monarchy could be established besides the three ways Paine describes?

3. Hereditary Succession in Eighteenth-century England was not just reserved for kings. Members of the House of Lords also passed down their power to their heirs. Why do you think Paine only attacks the monarchy?

4. According to Paine, “We have a duty to mankind to end our relationship (with Britain).” Why is it a duty to mankind instead of only a duty to the colonists?

5. By the end of Chapter 2, Paine has spilled a lot of ink attacking the monarchy. Pretend you are a critic of breaking away from England. Can you think of something positive about having or keeping a king?

6. In *Common Sense*, Paine theorized that only a small portion of Britain's navy and troops would be available to put down the revolution. In reality, the force that Britain sent was the largest ever sent for any military action up to that time. Do you think the discrepancy was intentional, or did Paine just completely underestimate the numbers? Why or why not?

7. The illustration opposite the biography of Thomas Paine near the front of this book shows a young colonist looking at a sign that points to opposite directions. If you were the person in that picture, what would you be thinking?

8. In the Introduction are these words: "The founding fathers were like you and me, with extraordinary beliefs in the common good for their fellow citizens . . ." What do you think that means?

9. *Common Sense* was originally printed as a pamphlet, without a cover like a book or magazine has today, and was tied together with either coarse string or leather. This made it affordable to publish, which meant it could be sold cheaply so that most people could afford to buy a copy. Why was this important? Do you think this was the author's purpose?

10. In absolute monarchies, Paine reminds us that kings are in charge of everything: business, civilian, and military affairs. This was true even if they had no experience in one or all of these areas. If you could only choose one of these areas (business, civilian, or military), which would be the most important for the monarch to have personal experience in? Why do you think so?