

Lesson 2: Declaring Independence

Big Ideas of the Lesson

- In 1776, Thomas Paine published a booklet called *Common Sense*. It urged the colonists to seek independence.
- In June of 1776, the Second Continental Congress appointed a committee to draft a Declaration of Independence.
- Thomas Jefferson became the main author of the document.
- The Declaration included a list of grievances the colonists had against the King and Parliament.
- On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence.

Lesson Abstract:

In this lesson, students explore sequence of events leading to the formal *Declaration of Independence* by the American colonies. Students begin by analyzing two primary sources related to the early military campaigns of the Revolutionary War. Then, they explore sections of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. In the final part of the lesson they learn about the drafting of the *Declaration* and explore its significance.

Content Expectations

5 – U3.1.4: Describe the role of the First and Second Continental Congress in unifying the colonies (addressing the Intolerable Acts, declaring independence, drafting the Articles of Confederation).

5 – U3.1.6: Identify the role that key individuals played in leading the colonists to revolution, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, John Adams, and Thomas Paine.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects:

W.5.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

Key Concepts

Declaration of Independence
government by consent
revolution

Instructional Resources

Equipment/Manipulative

Overhead projector or document camera/projector

Student Resource

Bower, Burt, et al. *America's Past*, Social Studies Alive Program. Palo Alto, CA: Teacher's Curriculum Institute, 2010 or a similar fifth grade social studies textbook. Pp 163-167.

Fritz, Jean. *Will You Sign Here, John Hancock?* New York: Putnam Juvenile, 1997. (optional)

Teacher Resource

Declaration of Independence: Right to Institute New Government. Fragment of Earliest Draft.
Thomas Jefferson. 7 January 2012 <<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jeffdec.html>>.

Egbo, Carol. *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 2)*. Teacher-made material. Michigan Citizenship Collaborative, 2011.

Henry Knox. American Revolution. 29 February 2012
<<http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=24017>>.

Jefferson's Writing Desk. 29 February 2012
<<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/images/vc30.jpg>>.

Rough Draft of the Declaration. USHistory.org. 29 February 2012
<<http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/rough.htm>>.

Chapter 12: Supply of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores. Transportation of Artillery. 29 February 2012 <<http://www.army.mil/cmh/books/RevWar/risch/chpt-12.htm>>.

Lesson Sequence

1. Display Thomas Paine's "Quotation", located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 2)*. Read the quotation out loud and briefly discuss the terms "absurd" and "perpetually" with students. Then, have students write a short journal entry explaining what they think the quotation means. Encourage students to write down any questions they may have about the quote as well. Provide time for students to write and then have them share their writing with a partner.
2. Discuss the quotation in the large group and explain that they will learn more about the author of the quotation, Thomas Paine, in this lesson. Write any questions students may have raised about the quote on the board.
3. Remind students that, as they learned in the previous lesson, not many Americans were thinking seriously about declaring independence from Britain in early 1775. Explain that by 1776 this had begun to change for reasons including the following:
 - Ethan Allen had been successful in taking Fort Ticonderoga.
 - Although the Continental Army had officially lost the Battle of Bunker Hill, they had shown people they could fight bravely against the British.
 - The Olive Branch Petition sent to the King by the Second Continental Congress had failed.
 - The King had decided to hire German mercenaries. This angered many colonists.

- The King had shut down colonial trade.
 - George Washington continued to make plans to fight the British including a plan to force them to leave Boston.
4. Divide students into small groups of three or four students each. Provide each group with a copy of “Artifacts”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 2)*. Tell groups to examine the two artifacts on the sheet and develop a theory as to what historical event they refer. Provide students time to work and then have them share their theories in the large group.
5. Share the following information about the historical event relating to the two artifacts and have students compare the information to their theories:
- In January of 1775, George Washington assigned Henry Knox to be in command of the Continental Army’s artillery.
 - His first task was to move the 59 cannons from Fort Ticonderoga in New York to the Boston area. This was a distance of nearly 300 miles.
 - It took 80 yoke of oxen dragging 42 huge sleds to move the cannon that weighed nearly 60 tons which is equal to 120,000 pounds!
 - The mission took three months and ended on March 4, 1776 when 2,000 men and 400 oxen hauled the cannon up Dorchester Heights overlooking Boston.
 - Intimidated by the artillery, the British withdrew from Boston on March 17, 1776. Explain that March 17th is still celebrated in Boston as Evacuation Day – the day the British left Boston.
6. Using Word Card #6, ask students how the “freeing” of Boston might have affected public opinion, or the point of view held by most people, regarding the idea of independence. Discuss student responses and guide them in understanding that public opinion was beginning to change. Explain that Thomas Paine, the author of the quotation used in Step 1, was one of the people who influenced the change of public opinion. Explain that unlike Henry Knox, who gained support for independence through military action, Thomas Paine gained support through his writing. Share the following information about Paine:
- In January of 1776, Thomas Paine published a 46-page booklet called “Common Sense.”
 - In the booklet, Paine called for colonists to rebel against the “violent abuse of power.”
 - He questioned the right of any king to rule over anyone.
 - Many people read his booklet and were persuaded to join the patriot side, urging the colonists to seek independence.
7. Place students in groups of five and give each student a copy of the “Analyzing a Primary Source” chart, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 2)*. Assign one of the five numbered quotations from *Common Sense* to each group. Explain that group members should work together to “translate” or figure out the meaning of their assigned quotation. Note that a chart showing possible answers has also been included in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 2)*.

8. When groups have finished, re-arrange students into five new groups consisting of one member from each of the numbered groups in Step 7. Have each student in the group explain the quotation their group worked on.
9. Lead a large group discussion of the quotations and why they think words like these led many people to support the move toward independence.
10. Explain that by June of 1776, the Second Continental Congress had moved closer to declaring independence. On June 7, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia gave a speech saying the colonies no longer owed loyalty to the king. At the end of his speech, he suggested a resolution, or formal statement, stating, resolved: That these united colonies are, and of right out to be, free and independent States.” Explain that his resolution resulted in several days of debate. Have students discuss why such a statement might have engendered such debate at this point in history.
11. Note that at this time in the lesson, you may want to give each student a copy of “Gathering Information from a Textbook” chart, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 2)*. Explain that students should read the textbook section relating to the Declaration of Independence and take notes on important events that occurred during the drafting, approval, and signing of the Declaration. Provide students time to read and take notes.
12. Have students meet in a small group and compare their charts of notes. Encourage them to add information, corrections, etc. based on the group sharing. As you continue the lesson, have students use their notes as a reference sheet.
13. Explain that on June 11, 1776, after debating and postponing a decision on the Lee resolution, Congress decided to appoint a Committee to draft a statement giving the colonial case for independence. Using Word Card #7, explain that this became known as the “Declaration of Independence.” Explain that each committee member was from a different colony. Ask students why they think the Congress did this. Discuss student responses and guide them to the idea that the Congress wanted different perspectives represented. Share the following list of committee members:
 - John Adams, Massachusetts
 - Benjamin Franklin, Pennsylvania
 - Roger Sherman, Connecticut
 - Robert Livingston, New York
 - Thomas Jefferson, Virginia
14. Explain that the Congress then recessed for three weeks. The committee decided that Thomas Jefferson should do the main drafting of the Declaration. Display the photograph of “Thomas Jefferson’s Writing Desk”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 2)* and explain that this mahogany lap desk designed by Jefferson and built by a Philadelphia cabinetmaker was used to draft the Declaration. Guide students in comparing and contrasting this desk with a modern-day laptop computer.

15. Display “Fragment of the Earliest Known Draft of the Declaration,” located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 2)* and ask students what questions this artifact raises for them. Record students’ questions on the board or an overhead transparency. Encourage students to draw conclusions based on the artifact. Possible conclusions include that Jefferson made a lot of changes to his first draft that he crossed out whole sections of his draft, and that he added and deleted words.
16. Display “Rough Draft of the Declaration”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 2)*, and ask students to compare this to the artifact from Step 15. Ask students what questions they may have regarding these two artifacts. Explain that this was the rough draft Jefferson most likely gave to Ben Franklin and John Adams who made some editing changes before the draft went to the Congress. Note: This is a perfect opportunity to point out the writing process in action over 200 years ago.
17. Explain that on July 1, 1776, Jefferson presented a “cleaned-up” draft of the Declaration to the Congress. Congress spent the next three days making some changes and deletions. Explain that one of the most significant changes involved the removal of a long paragraph that attributed responsibility of the slave trade to British King George III. Ask students why they think this section were taken out. Discuss student response and guide students to the idea that members of Congress from the South insisted that this section be removed. Explain that by the end of the process; about twenty-five percent of Jefferson’s original words had been taken out. Historians note that Jefferson was angry over these changes.
18. Display the “Declaration of Independence Timeline”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 2)*, and use it to discuss the final steps in declaring independence. Note that students can also compare this timeline to the notes they collected from reading their textbook section on the Declaration. Share the following facts at the end of your discussion:
 - The bronze from the statue of King George destroyed by Continental soldiers was later made into bullets used by the army.
 - John Hancock was the president of Congress and wrote his name in large letters, supposedly so the King could read it without his glasses.¹
 - Exactly 50 years after the adoption of the Declaration, on July 4, 1826, both Thomas Jefferson and John Adams died.
19. As an optional enrichment, you may want to read students the Jean Fritz book, *Will You Sign Here, John Hancock?*, which is a good biography of Hancock and includes good information relating to the content of this lesson.
20. Explain that the decision to declare independence from Britain was one of the most important decisions in our country’s history. Explain that in the next lesson students will explore the Declaration itself.

¹ Historians question whether there is evidence that Hancock was the first signer. His was the only delegate's name attached to the first printed version of the Declaration, but he (and other delegates) did not sign until August 2. Historians also question the story with the king's glasses – arguing that this is also probably myth.

Assessment

As an assessment, have students write a newspaper article reporting the drafting and adoption of the Declaration. A Writing Plan has been included in the *Supplemental Materials, (Unit 6, Lesson 2)* for students to use for pre-writing. Note that the charts for textbook notes as well as the small group activities of this lesson can also be used for assessment.