

Lesson 3: The Declaration of Independence

Big Ideas of the Lesson

- The Declaration of Independence is one of the most important documents in American History.
- The Declaration included ideas colonial leaders had about government. For example, Thomas Jefferson used ideas about natural rights such as life and liberty in the Declaration.
- He also used ideas that had been written down in previous documents, such as the resolution of the Stamp Act Congress.
- The Declaration included a list of grievances against the King and Parliament.
- Important ideas included equality, unalienable rights, and consent of the governed.

Lesson Abstract:

In this lesson students explore the *Declaration of Independence*. The lesson begins with an activity in which students sequence events leading up to the adoption of the Declaration, which were explored in the first two lessons of this unit. Students then review political ideas and events from the previous unit as a way to access prior knowledge important to an understanding of the *Declaration of Independence*. Working in small groups, they write their own Declarations and then analyze the actual declaration. The lesson ends with a discussion of the influence and significance of the *Declaration of Independence*. As an optional assessment students design a poster, using traditional paper pencil or web 2.0 tools like Wordle (wordle.com) or Glogster (glogster.com), which celebrates the *Declaration of Independence*.

Content Expectations

- 5 – U3.1.5: Use the Declaration of Independence to explain why the colonists wanted to separate from Great Britain and why they believed they had the right to do so.
- 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.
- 5 – U3.1.7: Describe how colonial experiences with self-government (e.g., Mayflower Compact, House of Burgesses and town meetings) and ideas about government (e.g., purposes of government such as protecting individual rights and promoting the common good, natural rights, limited government, representative government) influenced the decision to declare independence.

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

authority

Declaration of Independence
government by consent
unalienable rights

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.

St. George, Judith. *The Journey of the One and Only Declaration of Independence*. New York: Philomel Publishing, 2005. (optional)

Teacher Resource

Egbo, Carol. *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*. Teacher-made material. Michigan Citizenship Collaborative, 2012.

Lesson Sequence

1. As method of reviewing the important events of the previous two lessons, give each student a copy of "Timeline Cards" and "Review of Events Timeline," located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*. Explain that students should cut out the cards and place them in the correct sequence on the Timeline. Note that a completed timeline showing the correct chronological order has also been included in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*.
2. Explain that in this lesson, students will be examining the Declaration of Independence in depth. Ask students where they think Thomas Jefferson got his ideas for this document. Discuss student responses. Guide students to the idea that Jefferson used the ideas of people like John Locke regarding natural rights such as the right to life, liberty, and property. He also used ideas written down in previous documents like the resolution, passed at the Stamp Act Congress and the Virginia Resolutions.
3. Using Word Cards #8 - #17 and the list of "Important Ideas of the Declaration," located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*, discuss the foundational ideas important in the Declaration of Independence.
4. Divide students into small groups of four and explain that groups will be working together to write a Declaration of Independence based on the same organizational structure of the real Declaration. Provide each group a copy of the "Planning Your Declaration of Independence" project sheet located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*, and display a copy of the sheet. Using Word Card #18, explain the four main parts of the Declaration as described on the sheet. Give students time to draft their declarations. If needed, give each group a copy of the "Important Ideas" used in Step 3, copies of Word Cards #8-#17, and the "Timeline of Events Leading to the Revolution," located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*, to use as reference materials. Students could also use their textbooks.

5. Provide students time to finish their planning sheet and drafts. Then, have students prepare their declarations to read out loud in front of the class. When groups are ready have each group present their declaration. Compare and contrast the declarations of the various groups.
6. Display “The Preamble”, located in the *Supplemental Materials, (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*, and explain that this is the actual introduction to the *Declaration of Independence*. Read the text out loud to the class and highlight familiar words and phrases. Pause to discuss the meaning of the phrases in the Preamble. Use Word Card #19, to explain the term ‘unalienable rights’. Then, have students summarize the meaning of the preamble in their own words in the social studies journals. Note that a copy of the complete *Declaration of Independence* has been included in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*, for reference.
7. Display the “Ideas about Government” located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*. Explain that this is the second part of the Declaration. Using a highlighter, mark important political ideas described in this section. These include equality, unalienable rights, consent of the governed, right of the people to alter or abolish a government, etc. Discuss with students the ideas and how the colonists used them to support their claim for independence.
8. Provide each student a copy of the two-page “Analyzing Grievances” sheet located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*. Review the two sheets with students. Note that the first sheet lists grievances from the third part of the Declaration, while the second sheet is the student activity. Provide students time to complete the activity. Collect the second sheet which can be used as an assessment and then discuss the grievances. Note that a sheet showing sample answers has also been included in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*.
9. Display “Declaring Independence, Overhead #5,” located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 6, Lesson 3)*, and explain that this is the final part of the *Declaration of Independence*. Discuss the various parts of this section which include the statement of independence, as well as a list of things the new country can do such as levy war, establish trade, etc.
10. Display the following question and ask students to answer it in their journals: “Why is the *Declaration of Independence* such an important document?” Give students time to write and then have them share ideas with a partner.
11. As a final option, read students the book “The Journey of the One and Only Declaration of Independence” by Judith St. George. This book is loaded with interesting facts and information about the *Declaration of Independence*, including secret locations where it was hidden during wartime.

Assessment

The group Declarations project from Steps 4 and 5, and the grievance activity from Step 8, can be used as informal assessments. Additionally, students could create a poster using traditional methods or if available, web 2.0 technologies like wordle or glogster. The poster should celebrate the *Declaration of Independence*. The poster should include:

- (1) Three important ideas included in the Declaration
- (2) Three facts about the Declaration
- (3) Three reasons it is important.