

*America on the World Stage
Teacher Scholars Program*

Title: “Holding On” and “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness” -

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Lesson Author: Jeanette Curtis

Key Words: Republican ideals, Declaration of Independence, Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness

Grade Level: History/Civics - 3rd grade also appropriate for grades 4 and 5.

Time Allotted: One 45 minute class period

- Lesson Overview:	Students will examine the opening and closing phrases of the sentence and be encouraged to memorize the whole sentence by the close of the fourth lesson.
- Guiding Questions:	What does it mean to hold on to something? What is meant by “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”? How can I memorize this sentence?

Learning Objectives (SWBAT) Students will generate examples of things it is desirable to hold on to. They will consider the meanings of and give examples of the meanings of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They will begin to memorize the sentence.

Essential Historical Skills Taught:

- Historical Comprehension – Students will begin to understand and memorize one of the most important sentences in the world.
- Historical Analysis and Interpretation: Students will produce examples of what “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” mean to Americans.

- VA SOL and/or national standards

Selected State & National Standards –

Virginia SOL 3.11 “The student will explain the importance of the basic principles that form the foundation of a republican form of government by describing the individual rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and equality under the law.”

National History Standards, Part II United States History Standards

Students Should ... “Demonstrate understanding of the principles articulated in the Declaration of Independence by explaining the major ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence and their sources.”

Students will generate examples what of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness mean to Americans.

Assessment (Formative and/or Summative) The teacher will observe the students for understanding of the concepts being formed. In the closure activity the students will make posters which will demonstrate understanding..

Materials/Resources

Every student needs:

- A copy of the sentence.
- An index card or sticky note
- The sheet “*Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness poster*”

Modifications (to meet needs of diverse learners) – In this particular lesson, none should be needed.

Instructional Procedures

Introduction

What does it mean to hold on to something?

Students each write on individual slips of paper in large handwriting some things that they hold on to. Examples of answers might be: teddy bear, gold necklace, puppy, parent's hand - only one item per slip. Take a few minutes to share ideas. Then ask, “Why? Why do we hold on to these things?” Students will probably arrive at the basic reasons of treasure, safety and comfort. Place those headings on the board and have students bring their paper up to the board and use tape or magnets to sort their things into the three categories. Are there other reasons for holding on to things? Students will notice that some items do not fit neatly in one category.

The teacher will then tell the students that they will be learning a sentence that is very important to Americans. It is a treasure, and it provides comfort and safety to Americans and to people all over the world. They are now ready to be introduced to the sentence.

The teacher will read the sentence to the children explaining the individual words only minimally. It is one of the most important sentences ever written. Students will memorize this sentence during the next three days. Since students will be analyzing the words using dictionaries in lesson two, the place to focus now is “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Lead a class discussion of these three, emphasizing the following focus points.

Life: No one should be able to take away a person's life. The government can help in this by providing things that make for safety such as police, traffic laws, and military forces. Also, the government can make safety rules, such as rules restaurants have to follow to insure that food is safe.

Liberty: People have the freedom to make choices, such as how to spend their own money, how to raise their families. People are free to make choices about home or career.

Pursuit of Happiness: People have the right to do things that they need to do to make themselves happy. When John Locke stated these rights, he said, “Life liberty and property.” This section of the discussion could focus on being free to do the things one needs to do to be happy.

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Give each student will be given a sheet like this: A copyable document is in the Related materials folder under lesson one.

Life	Liberty	Pursuit of happiness

Students will draw a picture depicting each value in the space below the words. *There are some examples in the related materials folder accompanying this kit.*

Memorizing the Sentence

Students should be invited and encouraged (or required) to memorize the entire sentence word for word. It is one of the most famous sentences in the world. Jefferson said that this sentence “was intended to be an expression of the American mind.”¹ Of the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence, the author Stephen E. Lucas has said, “It capsulizes in five sentences--202--words what it took John Locke thousands of words to explain.”² Of course, we are only memorizing one sentence, 35 words. This sentence is worth memorizing word for word. It is reasonable to demand that the children repeat it accurately.

Once the class knows the sentence you can repeat it often while lining up or waiting for some scheduled event.

Here are some suggestions for teaching the sentence.

1. Give each student a copy of the sentence on a slip of paper broken into phrases like this:

“We hold these truths
to be self-evident,
that all men are created equal,
that they are endowed
by their Creator
with certain unalienable Rights,
that among these are
Life,
Liberty
and the pursuit of Happiness.”

2. Hand motions: Here are some suggestions for hand motions that could be used to give students visual cues. The motions could be varied, but should be consistent once taught to the class. (See PowerPoint)

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We hold these truths – hug self
to be self-evident, - form “glasses” with fingers in face.
that all men are created equal, - hold forearms horizontal to form an equal sign =. (One hand will be above the opposite elbow and the other hand below the opposite elbow.)
that they are endowed – extend forearms in a “generous” gesture
by their Creator – point to sky
with certain unalienable Rights, - curl fingers of each hand to form a C shape. Link the C's together and pull firmly to indicate that they can't be separated
that among these are – make a sweeping gesture with one arm
Life, - extend left forearm
Liberty- extend right arm upward like the Statue of Liberty
and the pursuit of Happiness. - “party in the air” with both hands above head

A PowerPoint showing these motions is included in the related materials folder of this kit.
As the students become more confident with repeating the sentence, the hand motions will become unnecessary.

3. Another idea: The sentence is divided into 10 parts above. Write each part on an index card. Give the cards out to students around a circle or in a line. Each student must say only his or her part “round robin” style. Use a timer. Students will enjoy trying to beat their former time. Pass the cards to the right and repeat. You can also do this as a type of relay race. The idea is to practice, practice, practice.

4. Make a manila colored poster with the sentence handwritten on the top. As students are able to repeat the sentence perfectly without reading it, allow them to sign the poster at the bottom. You may offer other rewards if you wish, but allowing kids to sign the poster is a great motivator.

Footnotes:

- (1) Jefferson to Henry Lee, May 5, 1825, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (1892-1899), vol. 10, p. 343.
- (2) Lucas, Stephen E., *The Stylistic Artistry of the Declaration of Independence*. U.S. National Archives & Records Administration
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_style.html

Closure

Students share their posters of Life Liberty and the pursuit of happiness and display them in a prominent place.

Students pair up and listen to each other say as much of the sentence as they can. Partners should be encouraging and help each other. The students will continue practicing over the next week or so until all have it.

Students will have begun to memorize one of the most famous sentences in the world. They will have worked together to develop a concept of what it means to “hold on” to something. They will have worked together to generate examples of holding on to something precious and of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” and designed a “poster” demonstrating their understanding.