

*America on the World Stage
Teacher Scholars Program*

Title” Self-evident Truths” - Defining Words and Phrases in this famous sentence from the Declaration of Independence

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Key Words: Republican ideals, Declaration of Independence

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

Time Allotted: One 45 minute class period

Lesson Overview	“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.” Six groups of students will be assigned a different word from the sentence. Each group will use dictionaries and be guided by a worksheet to use dictionary skills as well as thinking skills. Each group will report to the class and teach what they have learned to the rest of the class. The assignments use different levels of skills and provide differentiated experiences for students.
Guiding Question(s)	What do the words in this famous sentence mean? What does the sentence as a whole mean?

Learning Objectives (SWBAT) Students will be able to formulate definitions for the major words in the sentence from the Declaration of Independence and construct an understanding this famous sentence which has been called an American creed.

Essential Historical Skills Taught:

- Historical Comprehension – Students are studying vocabulary necessary to understand the sentence.
- Historical Research Capabilities – Students are using dictionaries to study vocabulary
- Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision Making – students are choosing which definitions enhance the understanding of the sentence.

Historical Analysis and Interpretation

Students will analyze the words in the sentence and then synthesize a clear demonstration of their comprehension of the sentence.

- VA SOL and/or national standards

1. 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

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“Students Should Understand: The causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in forging the revolutionary movement, and the reasons for the American victory”.

“Students will 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.”

Assessment Tool(s) – Formative: After listening to the reports of each group, the students will be able to make a poster or cartoon demonstrating their understanding of one of the words researched in this lesson.

Materials/Resources

Every student needs a copy of the sentence.

Each group needs a variety of dictionaries for comparison.

Group one will need access to online Merriam-Webster dictionary.

Each group has a worksheet to guide them through the study they have been assigned.

- 1) self-evident
- 2) equal
- 3) creator
- 4) endowed
- 5) unalienable
- 6) rights

Modifications (to meet needs of diverse learners) – The students are divided into six groups given tasks involving use of dictionaries. Each task provides a different level of challenge. Students should be assigned to groups to meet their diverse needs as learners. The teacher may adjust this plan to have some of the groups work with teacher supervision if the tasks seem too daunting.

Instructional Procedures/Process **Cooperative Learning Lesson**

The students will work together in six teams. Each team is assigned a different word from the sentence and given a worksheet matching that word. The groups will use a variety of dictionaries. The worksheet will guide them in using dictionary skills as well as thinking skills. Group One will need a computer with internet access. Each group will report to the class and teach what they have learned to the rest of the class. The assignments require different levels of skills and provide differentiated experiences for students.

Group 1: Assigned word: *self-evident*. This group will be using the free online dictionary from Merriam Webster found at <http://www.merriam-webster.com> to analyze the word. They will use a worksheet to understand the parts of the dictionary entry and construct a useable definition for the word. For differentiation, this assignment is appropriate for capable readers. After completing this activity this group should have a good understanding of how to use the online dictionary and should be able to guide other students through its use.

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Group 2: Assigned word: *Equal*. This group will have no trouble defining the word, but they will be involved in generating ideas of what is and what is not meant by “*all men are created equal*.” Examples of “What it could NOT possibly mean” would be *not the same height, not the same hair color*. Examples of “What it could mean” might be *same chance to get an education, same chance to choose a certain job*. This group will be using the skills of generating and evaluating ideas as well as comparing and contrasting. This activity would be appropriate for basic and remedial students.

Group 3: Assigned word: *endowed*. This group will need to look up the base word or root word, *endow*. They will use dictionaries to generate lists of synonyms and antonyms. This group will also be using skills of generating and evaluating ideas as well as comparing and contrasting. This activity would be appropriate for basic and remedial students.

Group 4: Assigned word: *Creator*. This group will be following a thread to construct a definition, since they will discover that *creator* is defined as “one who creates.” This group will be synthesizing definitions of *creator* and *create* to develop a definition of *creator*. This group will be required to use perhaps the most basic skills and this assignment will be appropriate for the least advanced students. However, there are some very deep ideas for this group to explore. Perhaps the teacher can lead the class into thinking about this as the group is sharing their findings. The fact that these rights are endowed by a creator makes them “God-given” rights. Many enlightenment thinkers, such as John Locke, talked about “natural rights,” meaning that the rights are a part of human nature. Jefferson and the writers of the Declaration of Independence purposefully designated the rights as “God given.”

Group 5: Assigned word: *unalienable*. Many children's dictionaries do not even contain this word as an entry word. This group will be using analysis and synthesis to break the word apart and then construct a meaningful definition. They will be generating words that have the same prefix or suffix. They will then explore an unfamiliar meaning for a familiar word, *alien*. They will then distill a meaning for this word. This is a complex assignment and is most suitable for gifted and advanced students.

Group 6: Assigned word: *rights*. This group will be exploring a word with many definitions and used as many different parts of speech. It should not be difficult for them to choose the correct meaning, but they should have fun exploring a word with so many multiple meanings and functions. For purposes of differentiation, this assignment might be most appropriate for a group that enjoys classifying, comparing, and evaluating. - perhaps the more mathematical and analytical crowd.

Closure: Each group should work together to draw a cartoon or poster or write a short paragraph explaining one word that was not the one their group did.

All six groups will be:
using dictionaries
formulating appropriate and useable definitions
sharing their findings with the class

And after all groups have shared, all students will experience
classifying
comparing and contrasting
analyzing and synthesizing
examining prefixes, suffixes and root words

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Epistemological wrap up, the teacher might choose to explain that this whole lesson is one of analysis and synthesis. The class has picked apart this particular part of the sentence and then worked together to synthesize an understanding of the sentence.