

Stark County Teaching American History Grant

**Stark County Educational Service center
2100 38th Street NW
Canton, Ohio 44709**

The Declaration of Independence



Grade Level: 8th Grade

Created by Ray Klein
Louisville City Schools

Duration: 3 days

Overview

Students will read and analyze the final draft of the Declaration of Independence. After gaining an understanding of the main topics of this historic document, students will write a letter home as if they were reading it for the first time. In the letter, they will explain what the document means to them as an individual and what they think it may mean for the British Empire.

Ohio Academic Content Standards (Current)

Standard: History

Benchmark E: Explain the causes and consequences of the American Revolution, with emphasis on both Colonial and British Perspectives

Indicator 4: Explain the results of important developments of the American Revolution including:

- a. A declaration of American independence

Standard: Government

Benchmark A: Explain why people institute governments, how they influence governments, and how the governments interact with each other.

Indicator 1: Analyze the principles of self-government and natural rights expressed in the Declaration of Independence and their relationship to Enlightenment ideas.

Revised Ohio Academic Content Strands

Strand: History

Theme: U.S Studies from 1492-1877: Exploration through Reconstruction

Topic: Colonization to Independence

Content Statement 5: The ideas of Enlightenment and dissatisfaction with colonial rule led English colonists to write the Declaration of Independence and launch the American Revolution.

Content Statement 6: The outcome of the American Revolution was national independence and new political, social and economic relationships for the American people

Enduring Understandings/ Essential Questions

Enduring Understandings.

- Revolutions cause people to examine their ideas of freedom and liberty.
- Revolutions help people define their rights as citizens

Essential Questions

- How do revolutions cause people to examine their ideas of freedom and liberty?
- How do revolutions help people define their rights?

Historical Background

Starting in 1585 on Roanoke Island, English Europeans immigrated in larger and larger numbers in America to carve out a new life in this strange new world. They came for many different reasons. Some came for fortune, some for political and religious liberty, yet others came simply for land and an opportunity to start a new life. Many used the labor of Africans and American Indians or expropriated Indian lands for cultivation.

New towns and 13 colonies developed and, even though some suffered the hardships of settling into the American wilderness, life for many was better socially, economically, politically, and spiritually. The men and women who developed these colonies came from many different cultures, religious backgrounds and walks of life. Their differences would help create an extremely unique place on planet earth. It became a place where people's values, ideas, and life-styles were founded on a sense of natural rights, liberty and freedom.

After Great Britain and their colonists successfully waged a war protecting their newly developed British colonies in North America from the French during the French and Indian War

(1754-1763), the colonists' sense of liberty and freedom was challenged. From the Proclamation of 1763 to the Coercive Acts, the colonist's resolve to maintain the same rights as other British citizens and to govern themselves was threatened. They repeatedly requested representation in Parliament, taxation only with their consent, and fair treatment by the British government to no avail. From civil protests to angry mobs, small meetings to colonial conventions, the idea of independence was increasingly shared and a revolution was born. The redefining of American rights and freedom began with the creation of the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson authored this historic document that would change the history of a nation.

Instructional Strategies

This lesson begins with an examination and analysis of the Declaration of Independence after the final draft has been issued. At this point in the learning process, students need to take a moment to read and understand the message that it delivers and the meaning that it has for mankind. **(Appendix A)**

Day 1

As a formative assessment, handout a copy of the Declaration of Independence to every student. Pass out the Declaration of Independence worksheet **(Appendix B)** to each student. Introduce the activity by explaining that Thomas Jefferson was chosen to author the document and that the 2nd Continental Congress edited his rough draft into the form that became the official version. This introduction will answer the first two questions. Have the students work individually to complete the rest of the assignment. Any unfinished questions should be completed as homework.

Day 2

Check student's homework to make sure that they made an effort to complete it. Discuss with the class their findings from yesterday's assignment while going over the worksheet. Use this activity as an informal assessment of their understanding of the document. Once the class appears to have grasped the purpose and meaning of the Declaration, introduce the friendly letter assignment. Pass out the handout that introduces the assignment and make sure that every student understands the task. Assign students the role that they are to take while writing their letter. For example, one may write as a merchant, a sailor, a plantation owner, an indentured servant, a governor, etc. Allow remaining class time for them to begin the assignment in case they have questions about the task. This will allow you the opportunity to check for understanding and address any problems they may be having. Assign the letters to be completed as homework. Announce that their letters will be collected the next day and ask students to be prepared to read theirs to the class.

Day 3

Collect the letters and have volunteers read their letters.

Resources and Materials

Appendix A: Summative assessment

Appendix B: Summative assessment rubric

Appendix C:

Declaration of Independence, The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html. (accessed April 10, 2011.)

The only primary source needed for this assignment is a copy of the Declaration of Independence; most textbooks contain a legible copy, one is included in this lesson, Appendix C, or you may find one at the following web site, www.loc.gov or at www.archives.gov.

Appendix D: Student primary source analysis worksheet

Appendix E: Answer key for student primary source analysis worksheet

Assessment

While reading and analyzing the Declaration of Independence, the students will complete the “Declaration of Independence” handout. This is a *formative* assessment that demonstrates their understanding and knowledge of the Declaration in general. The student worksheet can be found in **Appendix D**. The key for this assessment can be found in **Appendix E**. A copy of the Declaration of Independence can be found in **Appendix C**.

As a *summative* assessment, each student will write a 1-page letter from the vantage point of a colonist reading the Declaration of Independence for the first time. They will be writing home to a relative still living in England explaining what they just read and how they feel it will change the colonies and the world. The student instructional form for this assignment can be found below in **Appendix A**. The assessment rubric can be found in **Appendix B**.

Assessment Appendix A

Name: _____ Total Points: / 30

A Letter Home

Directions: Given a role that the teacher assigns you, write a one-page letter to a family member still living in England.

Requirements:

- 1) Explain four of the main points of the Declaration of Independence.
- 2) Express your feelings about the Declaration of Independence. Tell whether you agree with its writings or not.
- 3) Explain how you think it will affect your life in the colonies. Will it be a benefit or a hindrance to the new life that you have created?
- 4) Explain how you think it will affect the British Empire. Do you expect it to lead to war?
- 5) If a war comes, what side will you support and why?

Format: Follow the friendly letter format in composing this letter.

	_____ Street Address (Number and Street)
	_____ City State
	_____ Date
<p>Dear Recipient, <- <i>Greeting</i></p> <p>By the arrangement of the parts of this letter, you probably already know that it is a “friendly” letter. Friendly letters are much less formal and are not used for official purposes.</p> <p>The language of a friendly letter is much more casual and the audience is usually a friend, family member, or acquaintance.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Closing -> Sincerely,</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Signature -> A. Writer</i></p>	

**Appendix B
Assessment Rubric**

A Friendly Letter Home

	5	3	1	0
Main Points of declaration	Four main points of the document regarding why the colonies must separate from England are accurately and clearly explained	Three main points of the document regarding why the colonies must separate from England are accurately and clearly explained	Two main points of the document regarding why the colonies must separate from England are accurately and clearly explained	None of the main points regarding why the colonies must separate from England are explained or they are all inaccurate
Feelings Expressed	Writers feelings were clearly expressed and they clearly explained whether they agree or not	Writers feelings were expressed and they explained whether they agreed or not but it lacked substance	One of the elements was completely missing	None of the writer's feelings were expressed in the letter
Affects on self	The affects of the declaration were clearly and thoughtfully explained with details concerning the character 's life assigned	The affects of the declaration were clearly and thoughtfully explained but lacked details concerning the character' life assigned	The affects of the declaration were poorly explained or the letter was not completed in the character's life assigned	No affects of the declaration on self were mentioned
Affects on Britain	The affects of the declaration on Britain were clearly and thoughtfully explained with details	The affects of the declaration on Britain were clearly and thoughtfully explained but lacked details	The affects of the declaration on Britain were poorly explained	No affects on Britain were mentioned
War Support?	The potential of war was discussed and their reasons for or against war were clearly explained	The potential of war was discussed but their reasons for or against war were not clearly explained	The potential of war was acknowledged but their reasons for or against war were not explained at all	The potential of war was not mentioned nor their position explained
Friendly Letter format	Friendly letter format was followed perfectly	One error was made in the friendly letter format	Two or more errors were made in the friendly letter	Friendly letter format was not followed

			format	
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Appendix C

The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, —That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.—Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.
 He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.
 He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.
 He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.
 He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.
 He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.
 He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.
 He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.
 He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.
 He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.
 He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.
 He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.
 He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:
 For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:
 For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:
For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:
For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:
For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences
For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:
For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:
For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.
He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.
He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.
He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.
He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.
He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

The 56 signatures on the Declaration appear in the positions indicated:

Column 1

Georgia:

Button Gwinnett
Lyman Hall
George Walton

Column 2

North Carolina:

William Hooper
Joseph Hewes
John Penn

South Carolina:

Edward Rutledge
Thomas Heyward, Jr.
Thomas Lynch, Jr.

Arthur Middleton

Column 3
Massachusetts:

Column 4
Pennsylvania:

Robert Morris
Benjamin Rush
Benjamin Franklin
John Morton
George Clymer
James Smith
George Taylor
James Wilson
George Ross

Delaware:
Caesar Rodney
George Read
Thomas McKean

Column 5

New York:
William Floyd
Philip Livingston
Francis Lewis
Lewis Morris

New Jersey:
Richard Stockton
John Witherspoon
Francis Hopkinson
John Hart
Abraham Clark

Column 6

New Hampshire:
Josiah Bartlett
William Whipple

Massachusetts:
Samuel Adams
John Adams
Robert Treat Paine
Elbridge Gerry

Rhode Island:
Stephen Hopkins
William Ellery

Connecticut:
Roger Sherman
Samuel Huntington
William Williams
Oliver Wolcott

New Hampshire:
Matthew Thornton

Appendix D

Name: _____

The Declaration of Independence Analysis

Directions: Answer the following question based on your understanding of the Declaration of Independence.

1. Who wrote the rough draft of the Declaration of Independence and is considered to be the author of it? _____

2. Who edited the rough draft into its final version? _____

3. What is the purpose of the Declaration of Independence as stated in the first paragraph? _____

4. What are “unalienable rights”? _____

5. List the “unalienable rights”.

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

6) Who has these rights? _____

7) What is the purpose of government, as explained in the third paragraph? _____

8) Where does a government get its power? _____

9) According to the Declaration of Independence, if government does not protect the rights of the people it governs, what do the people have the right to do? _____

10) The majority of the writing in the Declaration is dedicated to reporting the injuries and usurpations of the king. List three of the issues. Then, explain why this long list was included. _____

11) In the resolution, the colonies are declared free and independent from Great Britain. Therefore, it has specific powers as a sovereign nation. What are they? _____

12) What sacrifices were the signers willing to make in order to gain America's independence? _____

Appendix E

Name: _____

The Declaration of Independence Analysis

Directions: Answer the following question based on your understanding of the Declaration of Independence.

1. Who wrote the rough draft of the Declaration of Independence and is considered to be the author of it? _____ Thomas Jefferson _____

2. Who edited the rough draft into its final version? _____ The 2nd Continental Congress _____

3. What is the purpose of the Declaration of Independence as stated in the first paragraph? _____ to dissolve the "political bands" with Great Britain _____

4. What are "unalienable rights"? _____ rights that cannot be given or taken away _____

5. List the "unalienable rights".

1) _____ Life _____ 2) _____ Liberty _____ 3) _____ Pursuit of happiness _____

6) Who has these rights? _____ "all men" _____

7) What is the purpose of government, as explained in the third paragraph? _____ to protect/secure citizens' natural rights _____

8) Where does a government get its power? _____ from the "consent" of the people that it governs _____

9) According to the Declaration of Independence, if government does not protect the rights of the people it governs, what do the people have the right to do? _____ to abolish the government and establish a new one _____

10) The majority of the writing in the Declaration is dedicated to reporting the injuries and usurpations of the king. List three of the issues. Then, explain why this long list was included. _____ the student's lists will vary from selections in the document _____ Why? Proof/justification of their actions _____

11) In the resolution, the colonies are declared free and independent from Great Britain. Therefore, it has specific powers as a sovereign nation. What are they? levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do

12) What sacrifices were the signers willing to make in order to gain America's independence? Our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour