

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

Interpretation of the Declaration of Independence

Grade – 7th Grade American History

Length of class period – One 58-minute class period

Inquiry – What was the meaning of the Declaration of Independence, and how did this document impact the citizens of the colonies?

Objectives—upon completion of this lesson, students will:

- Be able to identify the basic principles and grievances of the Declaration of Independence.
- Demonstrate their interpretation of excerpts of the Declaration of Independence through illustrations

Materials - a copy of *The Declaration of Independence: The Words That made America* by Sam Fink; Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence Handout (1/student) and copies of excerpt translations separated and paper clipped together in sets (1 set/pair of students); blank drawing paper (1/student).

Activities

1. Explain to the class that they will be examining passages from the Declaration of Independence and will be drawing an illustration for certain passages today. Read aloud to the class the book *The Declaration of Independence* by Sam Fink. Draw attention to the illustrations and how they assist the reader to understand each phrase of the Declaration. Because this book is the entire text of the Declaration, it will take about 15-20 minutes to read.
2. Divide students into pairs and distribute the Declaration Handout and excerpt translations. Students will work in pairs to match up the translations to their corresponding passages from the Declaration. Tell students NOT to write anything on their handouts until their matches have been checked by the teacher.
3. When all excerpts and translations have been checked and are correct, students can fill in the translations on their handout. When all pairs have finished go over the excerpts and translations as a class.
4. Explain the homework assignment. Students will be drawing an illustration of one of these passages, similar to the book we read at the beginning of class. To prevent several students from selecting the same excerpt, count students off 1-8 and assign them excerpts respectively.

Assessment - Informal assessments of on-task behavior during group work (+, √,-). Formal assessment of lesson is the illustration due the following class period, worth 20 points: audience can clearly understand the meaning of the passage through the images in the illustration; the illustration is neat and readable with appropriate captions or dialog boxes.

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards

Content Standard 3.1-- Describe the emergence of select governmental systems, principles, and institutions.

Content Standard 5.1-- Demonstrate an understanding of the historical background of the Declaration of Independence.

Matrix of Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence

Directions: You and your partner will receive a set of translations of each of the excerpts from the Declaration of Independence listed below. Carefully read each translation and find the excerpt to which it best corresponds on the table below. When you think you have all eight complete have the teacher check your answers. When all eight are correct, copy the translation into the appropriate box.

Excerpt from the Declaration of Independence	What the Excerpt Means
Excerpt #1: “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 cause which impel them to the separation.”	
Excerpt #2: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”	
Excerpt #3: “[T]o secure these [basic] rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...”	
Excerpt #4: “[T]hat whenever any form of government becomes destructive [in protecting rights and responding to the people], it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government...”	
Excerpt #5: “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.”	

<p>Excerpt #6: “To prove [that England has interfered with colonial rights], let the facts be submitted to a candid world: he has refused to assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.”</p>	
<p>Excerpt #7: “In every state 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.”</p>	
<p>Excerpt #8: “We, therefore...solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states...”</p>	

Original handout appeared in *Colonial Life and the American Revolution* by Teachers' Curriculum Institute.

Translations to use with the Declaration of Independence Matrix
Using scissors, separate each of the translations.

Translation A: England has repeatedly interfered with colonists' rights. In doing so, it has unfairly ruled over the American colonies.

Translation B: Individuals have some basic rights that are obvious and should not be taken away. Freedom, for example, is one of those rights.

Translation C: We now consider ourselves to be an independent country.

Translation D: Here is proof that England had interfered with colonial rights: the King has not allowed laws that help colonists the most.

Translation E: When one group of people is going to break away from a country to form its own nation, then they should explain why they are doing it.

Translation F: When a government is taking away the rights of citizens and is not doing what the people want, then the citizens have the right to change or replace the government.

Translation G: Every time we colonists felt we were being treated unfairly, we wrote the King. He answered by treating us more unfairly. A ruler who abuses his power should not be able to rule us.

Translation H: Governments are formed to make sure people's rights are protected. Government power should come from the people.

Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence **KEY**

Directions: You and your partner will receive a set of translations of each of the excerpts from the Declaration of Independence listed below. Carefully read each translation and find the excerpt to which it best corresponds on the table below. When you think you have all eight complete have the teacher check your answers. When all eight are correct, copy the translation into the appropriate box.

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<p>Excerpt #1: “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 cause which impel them to the separation.”</p>	<p>Translation E: When one group of people is going to break away from a country to form its own nation, then they should explain why they are doing it.</p>
<p>Excerpt #2: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”</p>	<p>Translation B: Individuals have some basic rights that are obvious and should not be taken away. Freedom, for example, is one of those rights.</p>
<p>Excerpt #3: “[T]o secure these [basic] rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...”</p>	<p>Translation H: Governments are formed to make sure people’s rights are protected. Government power should come from the people.</p>
<p>Excerpt #4: “[T]hat whenever any form of government becomes destructive [in protecting rights and responding to the people], it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government...”</p>	<p>Translation F: When a government is taking away the rights of citizens and is not doing what the people want, then the citizens have the right to change or replace the government.</p>
<p>Excerpt #5: “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.”</p>	<p>Translation A: England has repeatedly interfered with colonists’ rights. In doing so, it has unfairly ruled over the American colonies.</p>

<p>Excerpt #6: “To prove [that England has interfered with colonial rights], let the facts be submitted to a candid world: he has refused to assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.”</p>	<p>Translation D: Here is proof that England had interfered with colonial rights: the King has not allowed laws that help colonists the most.</p>
<p>Excerpt #7: “In every state 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.”</p>	<p>Translation G: Every time we colonists felt we were being treated unfairly, we wrote the King. He answered by treating us more unfairly. A ruler who abuses his power should not be able to rule us.</p>
<p>Excerpt #8: “We, therefore...solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states...”</p>	<p>Translation C: We now consider ourselves to be an independent country.</p>