



Lesson Plan: Understanding the Declaration of Independence

Context of the Unit:

This lesson is one component in a unit designed to teach students how the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights have created the system of government that we have in our country today.

Context of the Lesson:

This lesson is the first lesson introducing the system of government in the United States. This lesson focuses on the Declaration of Independence. Students already have an understanding of the events leading up to the signing of the Declaration including the idea of “taxation without representation” as well as the Boston Massacre and the growing tension between the Colonies and England.

Standards Addressed in the Unit:

History Social Science Standards

8.1.2 Analyze the philosophy of government expressed in the Declaration of Independence, with an emphasis on government as a means of securing individual rights

8.2.2 Analyze the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution and the success of each in implementing the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.

8.2.3 Evaluate the major debates that occurred during the development of the Constitution and their ultimate resolutions in such areas as shared power among institutions, divided state-federal power, slavery, the rights of individual states, and the status of American Indian nations under the commerce clause.

8.2.6 Enumerate the powers of government set forth in the Constitution and the fundamental liberties ensured by the Bill of Rights.



8.3.6 Describe the basic law-making process and how the Constitution provides numerous opportunities to monitor and influence government.

8.3.7 Understand the functions and responsibilities of the free press.

Standards Addressed in this Lesson:

History Social Science Standards

8.1 Students understand the major events preceding the founding of the nation and relate their significance to the development of American Constitutional democracy.

8.1.2 Analyze the philosophy of government expressed in the Declaration of Independence, with an emphasis on government as a means of securing individual rights.

Reading Comprehension

2.4 Compare the original text to a summary to determine whether summary accurately captures the main ideas, includes critical details, and conveys underlying meaning.

Visual and Performing Arts

2.1 Creative Expression—Create short dramatizations on selected styles of theatre.

5.1 Connections, Relationships, and Applications—Use theatrical skills to present content or concepts in other subject areas.

Common Core State Standards for ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading Grades 6-12



Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Craft and Structure

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing Grades 6-12

Production and Distribution of Writing

4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Objective:

- Students will gain an understanding of the ideas in the Declaration of Independence through the use of writing, illustrating, as well as dramatization.



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Big Ideas:

- The strength of a democracy is equal to the strength of its citizens.
- *E, Pluribus Unum*: Out of Many, One

Essential Questions:

- What does it mean to be an American citizen?
- Does social capital strengthen a republic?

Higher Order Thinking Questions:

- If you were a colonist, would you be a loyalist or a patriot? Give reasons to support your answer, comparing and contrasting views of each. (Analysis and Evaluation)
- What are some of the ideas about government that are implied in the Declaration of Independence? (Analysis)



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Assessment:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the Declaration of Independence through authentic assessments in the areas of writing, drawing, dramatization, as well as teacher observation.

Quality Criteria:

The quality of the students' work will be determined based on the rubric given to each student. The areas included in the rubric include criteria for the accuracy of the section interpretation, skit storyboard connection to the written interpretation, a creative interpretation in the dramatization of their section of the Declaration of Independence, as well as a short written assignment.

Rubric – Attached.



Understanding the Declaration of Independence—Project Rubric

	4—Advanced	3--Proficient	2--Basic	1—Below Basic
Translation of assigned section of the Declaration of Independence	Section is translated accurately with a clear understanding of section contents	Section is mostly accurate and the overall understanding of the section is obvious	Section translation is missing some of the main ideas and understanding of topic is not clear.	Section translation is inaccurate or incomplete.
Storyboard depiction of the assigned section	Storyboard includes drawings, captions, and speech bubbles that accurately depict the section of the Declaration that was translated.	Storyboard is missing one of the following: drawings, captions, or speech bubbles, but still accurately depicts the section of the Declaration that was translated.	Storyboard is missing two of the following: drawings, captions, or speech bubbles, but the storyboard accurately depicts the scene that was translated.	Storyboard is missing two of the following: drawings, captions, or speech bubbles and the storyboard does not accurately depict the scene that was translated.
Skit	Skit is an accurate and authentic portrayal of the section of the Declaration of Independence. Props add to the understanding of the topic.	Skit is a mostly accurate and authentic portrayal of the section of the Declaration of Independence. Props are used.	Skit is a somewhat accurate and authentic portrayal of the section of the Declaration of Independence. Minimal props are used.	Skit does not convey the meaning of the section of the Declaration of Independence. Few or no props are used.
Written assessment of understanding	Student demonstrates a clear understanding of the purpose and implications of the Declaration of Independence.	Student demonstrates a simple understanding of the purpose and implications of the Declaration of Independence	Student demonstrates minimal understanding of the purpose and implications of the Declaration of Independence	Student does not demonstrate a clear understanding of the purpose and implications of the Declaration of Independence

Overall Project Score: _____/16 = _____% = _____



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Lesson Activity Steps:

1. Hook: Provide each student with a few sticky notes. Write the question, “What are some things that kids your age complain about?” on the board. Have students write down one complaint on each sticky note. Give more if needed. As they write on their notes, have students come place them under the question on the board. Discuss.
2. Pass out a “break-up” letter to students written in the form of the Declaration of Independence. After the students read the letter independently, discuss with students what each section of the letter is trying to convey to the reader.
3. Explain to students that the components of this letter can also be seen in the Declaration of Independence. Just as they broke down the ideas in the break-up letter, they will interpret the language used in the Declaration of Independence in small groups and then create a storyboard of a skit to share their interpretations with the class.
4. Break students into small groups, and give each group one of the five sections of the Declaration of Independence to translate into common language.
5. Monitor students as they work together to translate their assigned section.
6. When students have successfully translated their section, provide each student with a blank storyboard to create the outline of the skit they will perform for the class.
7. Once students have successfully created the storyboard including captions and thought/voice bubbles, provide an opportunity to create props and costumes to enhance the class’ understanding of their section of the Declaration of Independence.
8. Students perform skits.
9. Students conduct a debriefing with the class for their portion of the Declaration to ensure understanding.



10. Students revisit the “break-up” letter presented at the beginning of the lesson and are asked to connect the part of the letter to the corresponding part of the Declaration.
11. Students answer the following question about the Declaration of Independence:
What ideas did the framers of the Declaration of Independence express in the document?
Why did some colonists want to remain under British rule?
If you were a colonist, would you be a loyalist or a patriot? Give reasons to support your answer.
What are some of the ideas about government that are implied in the Declaration of Independence?

Special Needs of students are considered in this lesson:

The five parts of the Declaration of Independence allow for differentiation throughout the lesson. This lesson was designed to meet the needs of GATE identified, Special Education students, and students with different learning styles. *GATE*—Students were given the second part of the Dec. of Independence to translate, as it is the most verbose and requires a depth of understanding. These students were monitored, but guided to answer questions on their own.

Special Education—These students were given a section that requires literal translation instead of a deeper interpretation. They were also assisted by the Resource Specialist throughout the entire lesson.

Learning Styles—Students whose strengths are more kinesthetic and or artistic are given the opportunity to show what they know through drama and art.

Extension Ideas:

- Students could create a “claymation” activity instead of a skit.
- Each student could do research on one of the important framers of the Declaration of Independence and present their findings to the class or write an essay on the figure.
- Students could compile their storyboards into a children’s book to share with younger students.



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Materials and Resources Needed:

- Declaration of Independence (divided into its 5 parts)
- Dictionaries
- Break-up letter written in form of the Declaration of Independence
- Skit storyboard worksheet
- Props and costumes for dramatization



Lesson Plan: Understanding the Declaration of Independence

Student Handout:

- **Preamble:** the reasons for writing down the Declaration (from "WHEN, in the Course of human Events" to "declare the Causes which impel them to the Separation."). What reason(s) did the Founding Fathers give for their decision to write out a declaration?

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.

- **Statement of beliefs:** specifying what the undersigned believed, the philosophy behind the document (from "We hold these Truths to be self-evident" to "an absolute Tyranny over these States"). What beliefs did the Founding Fathers declare they held?

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.



- **List of complaints:** the offenses that impelled the declaration (from "To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World" to "unfit to be the ruler of a free people"). What are a few of the complaints? Are any specific events mentioned? If not, is the information given sometimes sufficient to figure out to which events the complaints refer?

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 endeavored 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 harrass 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.

- **Statement of prior attempts to redress grievances:** (From "Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish brethren," to "Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.") In what way(s) did the framers claim to have already tried in addressing the complaints?

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish 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.



CALIFORNIA ON MY HONOR

Curricula for K-12 Civics Education

- **Declaration of independence:** (From "WE, therefore" to "and our sacred Honour.") What will change in the colonies as a result of the Declaration?

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.



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- **Preamble:** the reasons for writing down the Declaration

Translation:

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.

- What reason(s) did the Founding Fathers give for their decision to write out a declaration?



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- **Statement of beliefs:** specifying what the undersigned believed, the philosophy behind the document

Translation:

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 _____



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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. _____

- What beliefs did the Founding Fathers declare they held?



List of complaints: the offenses that impelled the declaration

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.

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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 harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

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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:



CALIFORNIA ON MY HONOR

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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.

- What are a few of the complaints? Are any specific events mentioned? If not, is the information given sometimes sufficient to figure out to which events the complaints refer?



• **Statement of prior attempts to redress grievances**

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.

Translation:

• **In what way(s) did the framers claim to have already tried in addressing the complaints?**



CALIFORNIA ON MY HONOR

Curricula for K-12 Civics Education

Create a storyboard for the skit you will present to the class. See rubric to be sure all required information is included in your storyboard.

1	2
1	2
3	4
3	4
5	6
5	6



Dear Julius,

We have known each other for 2 years now, and even though sometimes we get along really well, I feel like there are some things that just aren't working for me.

We are supposed to be in this relationship together, but sometimes I feel like you don't listen to me. That really hurts my feelings. I think that you should listen to my feelings, ask me how I'm doing, and tell me you love me everyday. I just really feel like you've been doing a lot of things that are not very nice. If you don't know what they are, I'll tell you.

You don't tell me how you're feeling.
You said something mean to your friends about me.
You lied about where you were.
You hardly ever listen to my side of a story.
Your friends are more important to you than I am.
You don't think my jokes are funny.
Sometimes I feel like you're using me.
You didn't notice my new haircut and outfit.
You bring me down.

I have told you over and over that I hate it when you do all those things and you never do anything to change. It just seems like I am annoying you when I tell you how I feel.

I think that it would be better for both of us if we broke up. I have made my decision, so from now on please do not try to call me or text me. It will be better for us if we are alone and can spend more time on school and our own lives.

From,
Jessica