

TEACHING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES—MTSU
Lesson Plan:
**The Declaration of Independence:
Its Legacy and Ideas in Today's World**

Grade: 8

Subject: Social Studies (U.S. History)

Time Required: Two 60-minute class periods

Author: John Mallick, John Sevier Middle School,
Kingsport City Schools

OVERVIEW

At the end of the French and Indian War (1763), victorious Great Britain was the only superpower left in North America, with France losing all her North American colonies. However, the French and Indian War left the British colonies broke. Beginning in 1763, the British government imposed a series of taxes and proclamations on their American colonies. The American colonists rebelled against these taxes through a series of boycotts, claiming that, as Englishmen, they were entitled to representation in England prior to any colonial taxation. In response to the British government's taxes and its declaration that the colonies were in open revolt, on June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia offered a formal resolution to the Second Continental Congress calling for independence of the American colonies from Great Britain. Thomas Jefferson was tasked in writing the Declaration of Independence. On July 2, 1776, Congress approved Lee's resolution for America's independence from Great Britain by a 12-0 vote (New York abstained). With independence adopted, Congress spent the next two days editing Jefferson's draft of the Declaration. On July 4, 1776, Congress formally adopted the Declaration of Independence and sent it to the printer for duplication and distribution.

UNDERSTANDING GOAL

Students will understand the origins and text of the Declaration of Independence. Why it was written? What are the central ideas of the Declaration? What ideas and legacy from the Declaration of Independence are important to you in the 21st century?

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn how to read a timeline, examine and interpret primary sources and using critical thinking skills write an expository paragraph on the Declaration of Independence's enduring ideas and legacy in today's world.



[\[Congress voting the Declaration of Independence\]](#) [1800; see also [this blurb](#)]

INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION

What were the central ideas of the Declaration of Independence and how would you describe the legacy of these ideas in today's world?

CURRICULUM STANDARDS

8th Grade Social Studies

8.23 Determine the central ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence and write an expository piece in which the legacy of these ideas in today's world is described and validated with supporting evidence from the text. (H,P)

8th Grade English/Language Arts

Reading: Informational Text – Key Ideas and Details.

1. Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.
3. Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

Continued on p. 2...

Curriculum standards continued from p. 1.

Writing

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

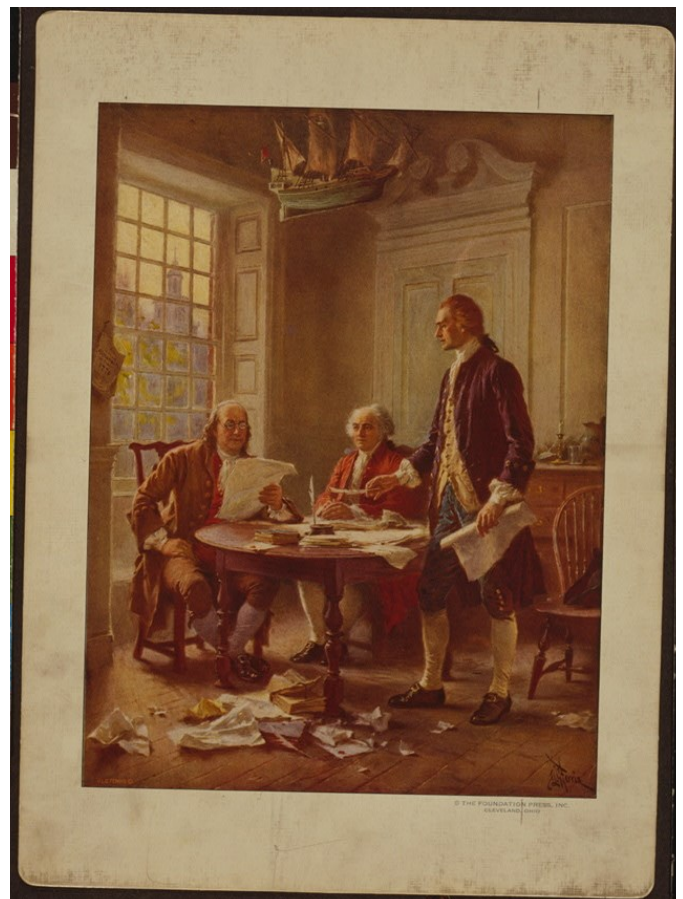
- Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
- Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
- Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
- Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
- Establish and maintain a formal style.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

MATERIALS

- Smart Board/Projector
- [Declaration of Independence PowerPoint](#) (*optional*)
- [Venn Diagram](#)
- [Declaration of Independence Web guide](#) (includes timeline)
- [Declaration of Independence Organizer](#)
- [Too Late to Apologize](#) YouTube Video
- [HBO's John Adams clip—Signing of the Declaration](#) YouTube Video
- Index cards (for exit tickets)
- [Worksheet: Rephrasing the Declaration of Independence](#) (pp. 8-9)
- Extended Response Rubric U.S. History (available from the [TN Department of Education](#), pp. 38-39 [pp. 46-47 within the PDF])
- [POW TREE + C graphic organizer](#) for writing an essay (available from the [TN Department of Education](#), p. 46 [p. 54 within the PDF])

PRIMARY SOURCES

- [John Locke Excerpt](#)
- [Virginia Declaration of Rights Excerpt](#)
- [Declaration of Independence](#) (Handout for class)



[Writing the Declaration of Independence, 1776](#) [1932, detail]

PROCEDURE

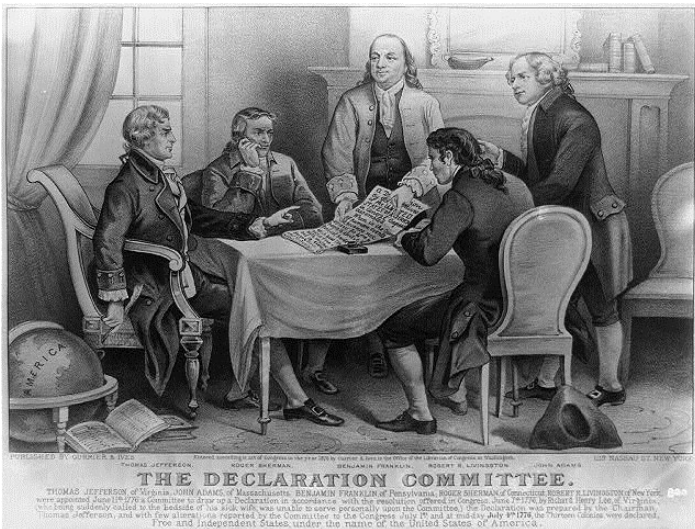
Day 1: The Origins and Formation of the Declaration of Independence

Step 1	Tell your students that you will be examining the origins and the formation of America's Declaration of Independence. Explain to the students that there will be two parts to the lesson. The first part is for the students to determine the origins of the Declaration of Independence. The second part of the lesson is for the students to determine the formation of the Declaration of Independence.
Step 2	Instruct the students to locate a piece of paper and in one sentence, write down why America celebrates the 4th of July holiday. While the students are writing their sentences, project the PowerPoint slide on the Smart Board/Projector. Review the student answers in the class.
Step 3	Pass out a blank Venn diagram to all the students. Break the students into groups of two. Have each student pair compare and contrast the duties of citizenship in 1776 to the duties of citizenship in 2015. Allow five minutes for each student pair to complete its Venn diagram. Project a slide with a blank Venn diagram on the Smart Board/Projector. After five minutes have gone by, randomly select four student groups to share their Venn diagram with the class. The teacher will write the student answers on the Venn diagram slide.
Step 4	Explain to the students that they will now be determining who and what inspired the Declaration of Independence. Project two slides on the Smart Board/Projector: short biographies of John Locke and George Mason.
Step 5	Divide the class into two groups and within these larger groups, break the students into pairs. Pass out a copy of John Locke's excerpt titled " Two Treatises of Government " (1690) to one half of the class and George Mason's excerpt titled " The Virginia Declaration of Rights " (June 12, 1776) to the other half. Direct the students to summarize two main ideas from their excerpts on sheets of notebook paper. Allow the student groups 10 minutes to read the short excerpts and write down their summaries. After the student groups have completed their assignment, the teacher will randomly select a number of student groups to review their answers. The other half of the class will copy these student answers onto their sheets of notebook paper. The teacher will direct the students to return their sheets of paper with the summaries of John Locke and George Mason to the teacher for a completion grade.
Step 6	Explain to the students that they will determine how the Declaration of Independence was formulated. Break the students into groups of four. Pass out to each student a copy of the timeline on the formation of the Declaration of Independence . Then, pass out to each group a copy of the Declaration of Independence . Lastly, pass out to each student a copy of the Declaration of Independence Organizer . The teacher will instruct the students on how to complete the graphic organizer. The teacher will explain to the students that within each group of four, each student will be assigned a task. One student will determine the two central ideas of the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence (p. 1) as well as determining the Committee of Five. The second student will determine the four central ideas from the section Natural Rights of Men (pp. 2-3). The third student will determine the two central ideas of the Lists of Grievances (pp. 4-10) and the importance of July 2nd and July 4th. The fourth student will determine the three central ideas of the Announcement of Separation (pp. 11-12). The students may use the text of the Declaration of Independence and the timeline to complete their assignment. The teacher will project a slide describing the four parts of the Declaration. At the end of the graphic organizer, the teacher will randomly select groups of students to share their answers with the class. The teacher will direct the students to give the teacher their Declaration of Independence graphic organizers for a completion grade.
Step 7	After the students have completed their Declaration of Independence graphic organizer, the teacher will show a YouTube video, Too Late to Apologize . After the video, discuss students' reactions.
Step 8	Hand out to each student a blank index card. The students will write on their cards what they learned from the lesson and give the completed cards to the teacher as they leave the classroom. The teacher will review the cards for student learning.

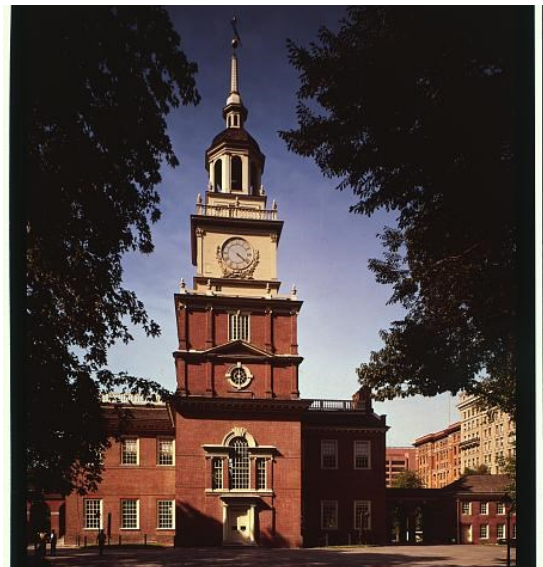
PROCEDURE, CONTINUED

Day 2: Writing expository essay on the central ideas and legacy of the Declaration of Independence in today's world.

Step 9	Explain to the students that their lesson will be writing an expository essay on the central ideas and legacy of the Declaration of Independence in today's world.
Step 10	The teacher will review the student exit cards from the previous day with the students for re-teaching purposes.
Step 11	The teacher will show a video clip from the HBO series <i>John Adams</i> depicting the signing of the Declaration of Independence. After the video clip is completed, the teacher will discuss students' reactions to the video.
Step 12	The teacher will break the students into pairs again. The teacher will then pass out to each student a graphic organizer, Rephrasing the Declaration of Independence (pp. 8-9). The graphic organizer has eight phrases that each student group will be instructed to rewrite in 21st-century language. One student in the group of two will be assigned four phrases to rewrite; the second student in the group of two will be assigned the remaining four phrases to rewrite. The students within each group will share their answers. The teacher will allow fifteen minutes for the students to complete their assignment. At the end of fifteen minutes, the teacher will randomly select student groups to share their rewrites with the class. The teacher will collect the completed student rewrites for a completion grade.
Step 13	Next, students will write an essay on the central ideas and legacy of the Declaration of Independence in the 21st century. The teacher will discuss with students the rubric for Extended Responses in U.S. History (or pass out copies). The teacher will then pass out to the students the POW TREE + C graphic organizer to assist them in writing their essays. The students will complete the graphic organizer using the Declaration of Independence materials from the past two days. After the students have completed their graphic organizers, they may use it with the rubrics to write their essays.
Step 14	The students will return their completed essays to the teacher for a grade. The teacher will use the essays to determine what the students have learned about the Declaration of Independence.



[The Declaration committee](#) [1876]



[South elevation - Independence Hall...](#)

EVALUATION

50% for Day One

- 25% group summary of George Mason's and John Locke's primary sources
- 25% for group graphic organizer breaking down the Declaration of Independence

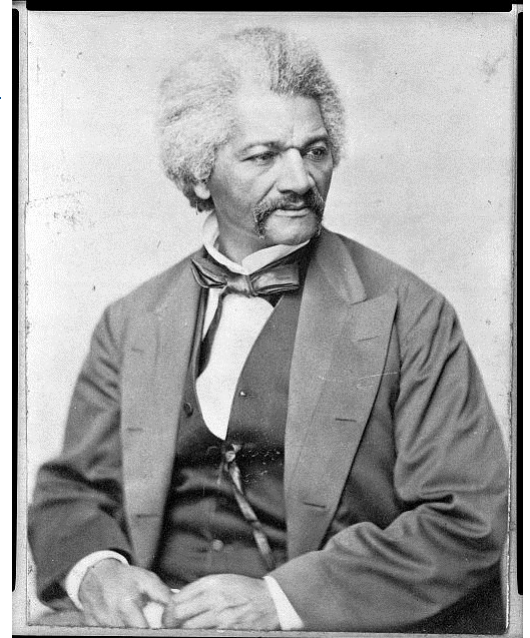
50% for Day Two

- 20% for the group Declaration of Independence rewrite
- 30% for the expository essay using the TNCore Social Studies rubric for extended response



[\[Portrait of Abigail Adams by Benjamin Blyth\]](#)
[between 1910 and 1920]

[\[Frederick Douglass, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing right\]](#) [1850? - 1860?]



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: The Declaration of Independence and Women's Suffrage

Have students read a letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams dated March 31, 1776, now known as "[Remember the Ladies.](#)" Pass out a copy of an [excerpt of the letter](#) to each student. As the students read the letter, have each student complete a [Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool](#). When the students have completed their analysis of the letter, the teacher will randomly select students in the class to share their answers. The teacher will then project on the Smart Board/projector the following discussion question: "Why doesn't the Declaration of Independence address women's issues discussed in Abigail Adam's letter?" (Standard 8.23, 8.49)

Activity 2: The Declaration of Independence and Fredrick Douglass

Have your students read a speech, "[The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro.](#)" by Frederick Douglass to the citizens of Rochester, New York. The date of the speech is July 5, 1852. Break you students into pairs and pass out excerpts of Frederick Douglass's speech to each student group (p. 11). Direct the student groups to read excerpts from the speech and answer the seven questions that are located underneath the speech. After the students have completed this assignment, the teacher will randomly select student groups to share their answers with the class. (Standard 8.66)

POW TREE+C GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

P	What am I being asked to do? Turn the prompt into a question.
O	Did I label the main ideas and highlight what is important?
W	Where do I start?
T	Thesis - What is my claim?
R	Why did I make this claim? 3 reasons
E	What text evidence can I use?
E	How am I going to end my response?
+C	How will I handle a counterclaim?

John Lock
Two Treatises of Government (1690) Excerpt

To understand political power, we must consider the condition in which nature puts all men. It is a state of perfect freedom to do as they wish and dispose of themselves and their possessions as they think fit, within the bounds of the laws of nature. They need not ask permission or the consent of any other man.

The state of nature is also a state of equality. No one has more power or authority than another. Since all human beings have the same advantages and the use of the same skills, they should be equal to each other. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it. Reason is the law. It teaches that all men are equal and independent, and that no one ought to harm another in his life, liberty, or possessions. All men are made by one all-powerful and wise Maker. They are all servants of one Master who sent them into the world to do His business. He has put men naturally into a state of independence, and they remain in it until they choose to become members of a political society.

Source: John Locke: Excerpts from his Two Treatises of Government

Modified from http://www.nisdtx.org/cms/lib/tx21000351/centricity/moduleinstance/30300/two_treatises_of_government.doc

George Mason
The Virginia Declaration of Rights Excerpt

A DECLARATION of RIGHTS made by the representatives of the good people of Virginia, assembled in full and free Convention; which rights do pertain to them, and their posterity, as the basis and foundation of government.

1. THAT all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.

2. That all power is vested in, and consequently derived from, the people; that magistrates are their trustees and servants, and at all times amenable to them.

3. That government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security, of the people, nation, or community; of all the various modes and forms of government that is best, which is capable of producing the greatest degree or happiness and safety, and is most effectually secured against the danger of mal-administration; and that whenever any government shall be found inadequate or contrary to these purposes, a majority of the community hath an indubitable, unalienable, and indefeasible right, to reform, alter, or abolish it, in such manner as shall be judged most conducive to the publick weal.

Source: [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/AMALL:@field\(NUMBER+@band\(rbpe+17802200\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/AMALL:@field(NUMBER+@band(rbpe+17802200)))

REPHRASING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Directions. 1) Read the excerpt. 2) Rephrase the excerpt into simple language that an eighth grader could understand. 3) Have a teacher check your work. Repeat these steps for all excerpts.

Excerpt	Rephrased Excerpt
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 causes of separation 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 by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.”	
Excerpt 3: “That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers form the consent of the governed.”	
Excerpt 4: “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 institute new government.”	

REPHRASING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Excerpt	Rephrased Excerpt
<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>Excerpt 6: “To prove this [that England has interfered with colonial rights], let Facts be submitted to a candid world. He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.”</p>	
<p>Excerpt 7: “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.”</p>	
<p>Excerpt 8: “We therefore...solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent State.”</p>	

Frederick Douglass Speech - July 5, 1852 Rochester New York

Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? and am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us?...

But, such is not the state of the case. I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. -The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak today? If so, there is a parallel to your conduct. And let me warn you that it is dangerous to copy the example of a nation whose crimes, towering up to heaven, were thrown down by the breath of the Almighty, burying that nation in irrecoverable ruin! I can today take up the plaintive lament of a peeled and woe-smitten people.

Source: https://brainmass.com/file/1385559/Douglass_July_4_1852.pdf

After reading the speech, please answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper or in your American history journal:

- Who wrote the speech?
- What was the location and date of the speech?
- What is your prior knowledge of the Declaration of Independence?
- Who was the audience for this speech?
- What was the reason for this speech?
- What was the significance of this speech?
- What is Douglass saying concerning African Americans in relation to the Declaration of Independence?