

★ A Famous Signature ★

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to help students demonstrate that each person must take responsibility for his/her actions, words, and deeds. The signers of the Declaration demonstrated responsibility for their actions.

Objective

The student will learn about John Hancock and his importance to the Declaration. They will recognize his signature and explain why it is important.

Theme - Responsibility

John Hancock was a chairman of the committee writing the Declaration of Independence. When the Declaration was written, Hancock gave a speech to the delegates stressing the importance of the document they were about to sign. Hancock and all the other signers took responsibility for the proclamation to be free from the rule of the King by signing the Declaration. A person's signature is a declaration of agreement with the things he or she signs.

Core Knowledge

Grade 1 - Amer Hist & Geog. Sec II: Early Exploration & Settlement. C. English Settlers. What did John Hancock and other signers of the

Declaration of Independence do to make a living in the colonies? Sec III: From Colonies to Independence. American Revolution. Tell the story of how the colonies became an independent nation.

Grade 4 - Amer Hist & Geog. Sec I: American Revolution, Declaration of Independence. Why did one person sign with a large signature? Who were the patriots and why were they called patriots? Sec II: Making a Constitutional Government. A. Main ideas behind the Declaration of Independence. B. Making a New Government. Who are the Founding Fathers?

Time

45 minutes

Materials

- ★ Declaration of Independence facsimile
- ★ John Hancock signature sheet
- ★ Tracing art supplies (e.g. cotton swabs, paint, crayons, hard candy, glitter, glue)

Preparation

- ★ Prepare handouts or transparency of the Declaration of Independence.
- ★ Copy John Hancock signature sheets for each student.
- ★ Gather art supplies.

Focus

Students learn from the actions of the Founders of the nation that people must take responsibility for their actions. Show the students the facsimile of the Declaration of Independence. Have them look at it carefully for one minute without talking. Then, ask them what they see. Point out the parts of the document including the title, the main body of text, and the signatures including Hancock's.

Explain to students that this is the Declaration of Independence. It was written in 1776 when the American people decided that they wanted to be free from their king. The men who wrote it knew that the king would be very angry and would send soldiers with guns to make the people obey him. If the Americans lost the war that followed, the men who signed the Declaration would be the first to be punished.

John Hancock was the leader of the Declaration signers. (He was President of the Continental Congress that approved the Declaration of Independence.) He understood the danger but signed the Declaration anyway. He was the first and only man to sign the Declaration on July 4, 1776. The other men signed it later. Hancock signed his name in big letters so that everyone, especially the king, could see it clearly. His big signature is so famous that even today when someone tells another person to sign his name, someone might say, “Put your John Hancock there.”

Activity

1. Give each student a copy of the John Hancock signature. Ask them if they recognize any of the letters. Explain that this is a special way to write letters called “engrossing” (beautiful script) which is like cursive writing.
2. Have students trace over the letters with their fingers several times to get the feel of the writing. They may also trace the letters with a cotton swap or pencil eraser.
3. Have students trace the signature using paint or crayons. Students can also trace the signature by gluing things like hard candy or glitter.

(Of course, this activity can be adapted to use anything that is available. The signature can be traced with beans, marshmallows, cotton, glow-in-the-dark paint, bits of tissue paper, etc. Older students may enjoy the challenge of trying to copy the signature free hand without tracing it. Older students may also like to try to use a real quill pen and ink, if available. Allow students to have an opportunity to focus on the signature in a way that is pleasant for them so that they will remember it.)

Closure

Ask students what it means when someone says, “Put your John Hancock there.” Remind students that we are free today because of the bravery of John Hancock and the other men who signed the Declaration of Independence.

John Hancock