

★The Declaration of Independence★

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to teach students about the important American ideas found in the Declaration of Independence. Students will become familiar with the overall structure of the document by putting together a puzzle of the text. A vocabulary and comprehension activity focuses on the opening passage of the Declaration.

Objective

1. The student will list the grievances the English Colonists used as reasons to declare their right to be free from English rule.
2. The student will use the Declaration of Independence to analyze the ideas of:
 - A. Purpose of Government
 - B. Human rights
 - C. Social Contract theory

Theme-Freedom

The Declaration of Independence is based on “Natural Rights.” Our most basic rights are given to us by nature.

NCSS Standards

Id. explain why individuals and groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and/or changes to them.

Ic. identify and describe selected historical periods and patterns of change within and across cultures.
VIb. describe the purpose of government and how its powers are acquired, used, and justified.
VIc. explain conditions, actions, and motivations that contribute to conflict and cooperation among nations.
Xa. examine the origins and continuing influence of key ideals of the democratic republican form of government
Xh. analyze the effectiveness of selected public policies and citizen behaviors in realizing the stated ideals of a democratic republican form of government.

Time

45 minutes

Materials

- ★ “The Declaration of Independence” text handout
- ★ “The Declaration of Independence” text scramble
- ★ “The Declaration of Independence” activity sheet
- ★ Dictionaries
- ★ Website - www.americanheritage.org

Preparation

- ★ Copy and cut the Declaration of Independence scramble for pairs or groups of students.
- ★ Copy the Declaration of Independence activity sheets for each student.

Focus

Ask students the name of the holiday on July 4th (Independence Day). Ask students if they know what important event happened on July 4th. (The Declaration of Independence was adopted on this date in 1776.)

Explain --The Social Contract Theory

The concept of the Social Contract Theory was developed by John Locke. Locke believed that government is created to protect the citizens. If the government fails to protect

or becomes tyrannical or abusive, the people have the right to overthrow or change the government. (See Links page on www.americanheritage.org for additional resources on the Declaration of Independence.)

Activity

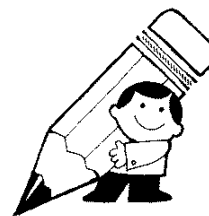
1. Provide students with a copy of the complete text of the Declaration of Independence from either this packet or some other resource. Give copies of the Declaration scramble to pairs or small groups of students. Students should use the text of the Declaration to put the puzzle in the correct order.
2. Have students define on the worksheet the four main sections or subpoints of the Declaration of Independence. Then form discussion groups about these concepts:
 - ★ Purpose of government
 - ★ Basic human rights
 - ★ Wrongs done by the King
 - ★ Declaration of independence by the colonies
3. Have students complete the vocabulary and comprehension activity sheet focusing on the opening passage of the Declaration.
4. Review the three parts of the Declaration of Independence and the important ideas included in the opening passage.

Closure

Have students reflect on, research, discuss, and/or report in an essay or writing assignment: What was the historical outcome of the Declaration? Also discuss the subsequent co-existence of the U. S. and England and how their relations are different today.

Assessment

Students will write a paragraph or journal entry explaining why the God-given rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are important to people today.



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 shown 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 meantime 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 migration 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 offenses;

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring 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, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and 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 endeavored 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.

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776
THE UNANIMOUS DECLARATION
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TEXT SCRAMBLE

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 shown

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THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia introduced a resolution in the Continental Congress that said, "These United colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States." A committee of five men was selected to write a formal declaration explaining the reasons for independence. One of these men, Thomas Jefferson, was the primary author of the Declaration of

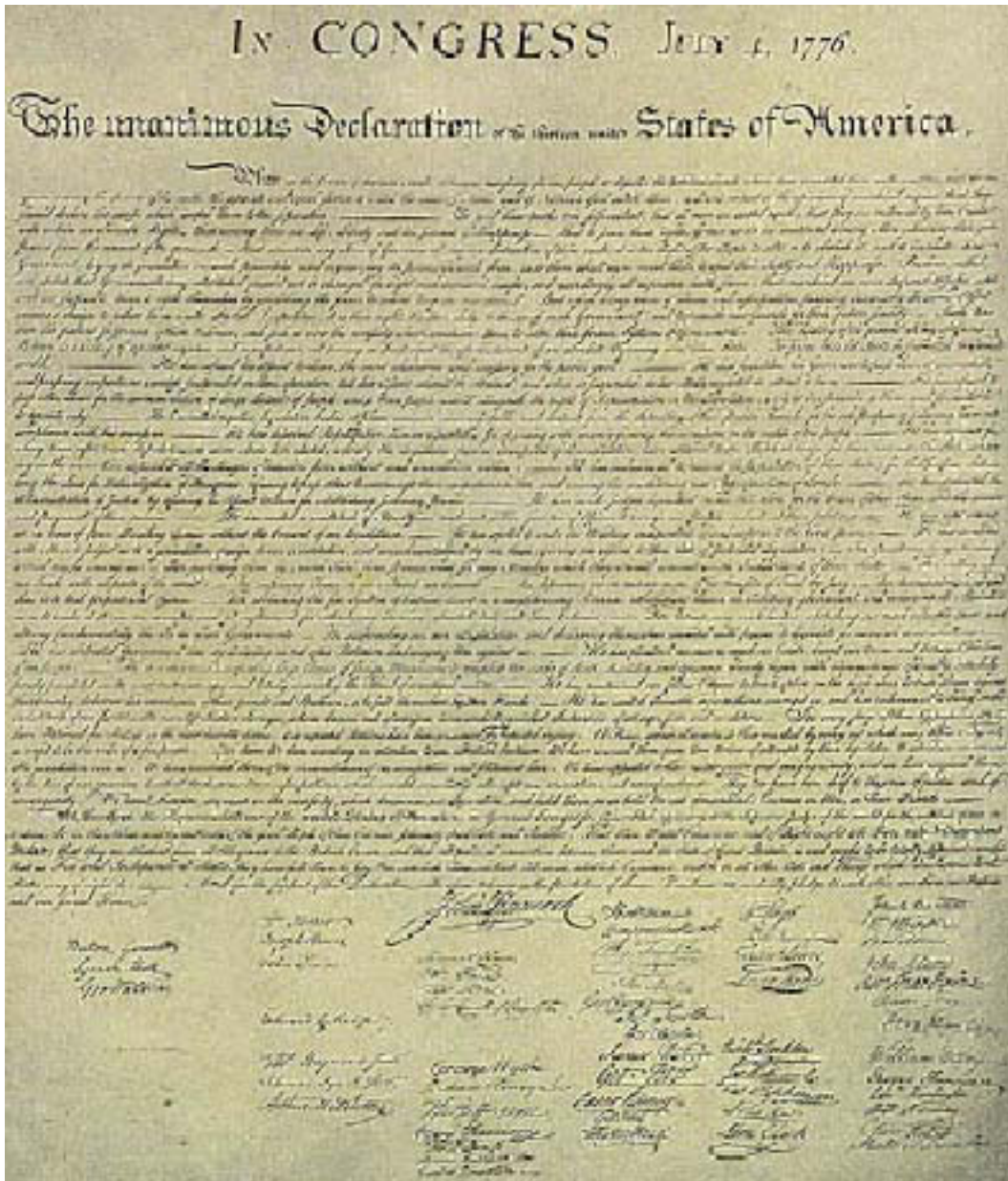
Independence that was adopted on July 4, 1776. The following passage from the beginning of the Declaration of Independence includes two important beliefs. First, all men are created equal with basic rights given to them by God, and, second, men set up government to protect their rights and may change the government if it does not respect these rights.

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Complete the following on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Define the ten bold words in the passage.
2. According to the Declaration, what are the three rights given by God to all people? What do you think these rights mean?
3. What does Jefferson say the people should do when the government becomes destructive of their rights?
4. The Declaration of Independence has been called the "birth certificate of the United States." What do you think this statement means?



Declaration of Independence

Worksheet

Purpose of Government:

Basic Human Rights:

Wrongs of the King:

Declaration by Colonists: