

# ★ 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, recognizing his signature explaining its importance.

## 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.

## TEKS

113.2.b.k.2, 3.b.11, 4.b.2.4, 5.b.3.1 History. The student understands how historical figures and ordinary people helped to shape the community, state, and nation.

113.3.b.1.12, 4.b.2.13, .5.b.3.10 Citizenship. The student understands characteristics of good citizenship as exemplified by historic figures and ordinary people.

113.5.b.3.11 Citizenship. The student understands the impact of individual and group decisions on communities in a democratic society.

113.5.b.3.13 Culture. The student

understands the role of real...heroes in shaping the cultures of communities, the state, and the nation.

113.6.b.4.18, 7.b.5.19 Citizenship. The student understands the importance of voluntary individual participation in the democratic process.

113.6.b.4.19, 7.b.5.20 Citizenship. The student understands the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society.

113.7.b.5.2 History. The student understands how conflict between the American colonies and Great Britain led to American independence.

113.7.b.5.11 Economics. The student understands the reason for exploration and colonization.

113.7.b.5.12 Economics. The student understands the characteristics and benefits of the free enterprise system in the U. S.

113.7.b.5.15 Government. The student understands how people organized governments in colonial America.

113.7.b.5.16 Government. The student understands important ideas in the Declaration of Independence and the U. S. Constitution.

## Time

45 minutes

## Materials

- ★ Declaration facsimile
- ★ John Hancock signature sheet
- ★ Tracing art supplies (e.g. cotton swabs, paint, crayons, hard candy, glitter, glue)
- ★ Website - [www.americanheritage.org](http://www.americanheritage.org)

## Preparation

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

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## 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." (See Links page on [www.americanheritage.org](http://www.americanheritage.org) for additional resources on the signers of the Declaration.)

## Activity

1. Students may research a signer and write a brief biography or report about him. The students may present these reports and/or their findings in class. Discuss/review as a class what the signers and their lives were like during the colonial period. Who were the signers? What were their personalities, histories, occupations, families, and lifestyles like? What were their beliefs, values, and motivations? The teacher will review information on the signers and answer any questions.
2. Also referring to the "Declaration of Independence" unit, discuss/review with students why these brave individuals signed the Declaration of Independence and what it meant for their lives. Was it dangerous to sign the declaration at that time? Talk about the bravery of these signers. Also discuss the peaceful co-existence today of the U. S. and England and how relations have changed.
3. Getting familiar with some of the signers, students may color the portraits of one or more of the signers and include them with their research and/or report. They may also try to find other portraits of other signers in artwork or drawings to cite and present.
4. A. Give each student a copy of the John Hancock signature. Ask them if they recognize

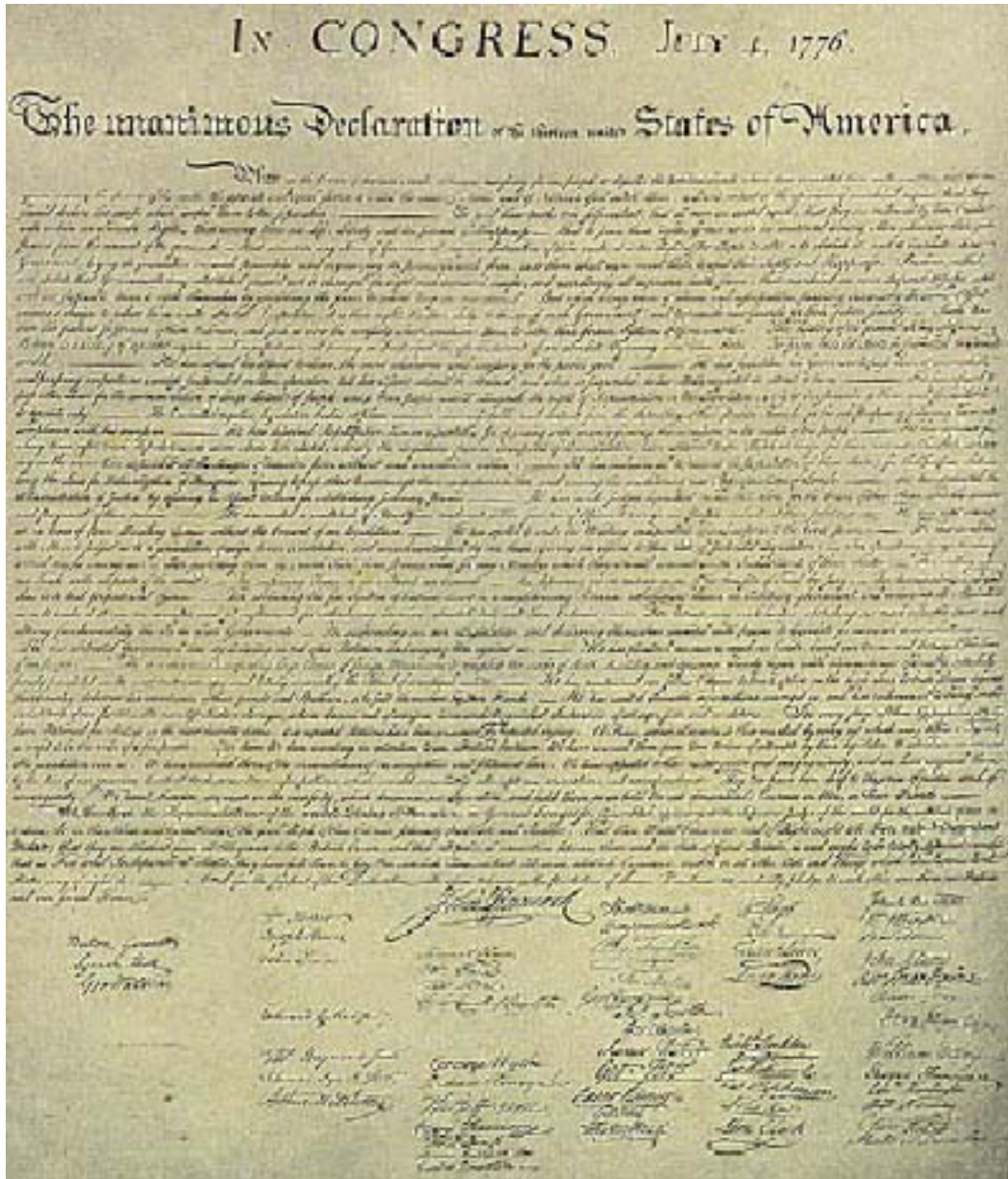
any of the letters. Explain that this is a special way to write letters called “engrossing” (beautiful script) which is like cursive writing.

B. 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. Then have students trace the signature using paint or crayons. Students could also glue things on the tracing like hard candy, glitter, 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. They may also like to try a real quill pen and ink, if available. Allow students to have an opportunity to pleasantly and visually focus on the signature and identify it.

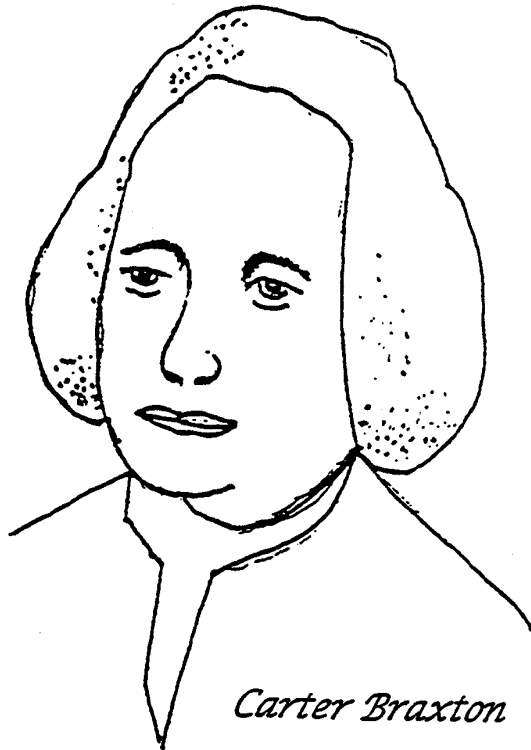
5. Have students examine a facsimile, poster, or representation of the original Declaration document and see if they can identify and decipher the signatures of these brave men.

## **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.

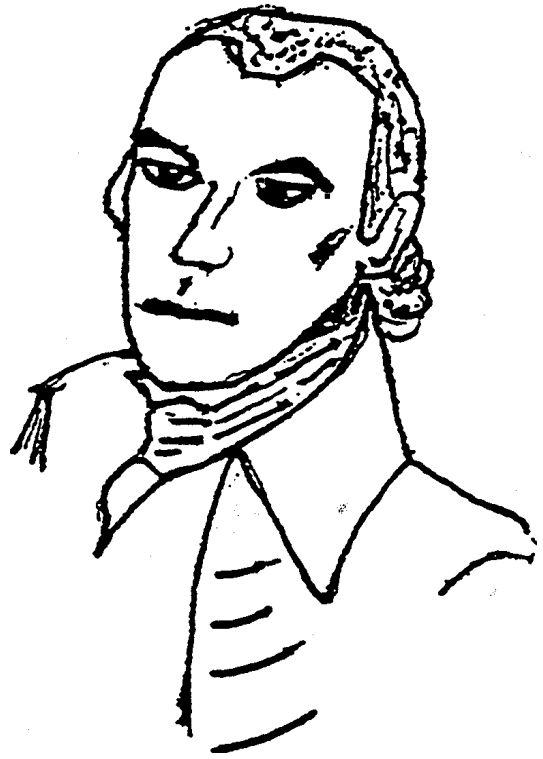


A large, elegant cursive signature of John Hancock. The signature is written in a classic, flowing script with a prominent, sweeping 'J' and a decorative flourish at the end.



*Carter Braxton*

*Carter Braxton*



*William Floyd*



*John Hancock*



*Benjamin  
Harrison*



*John Hart*

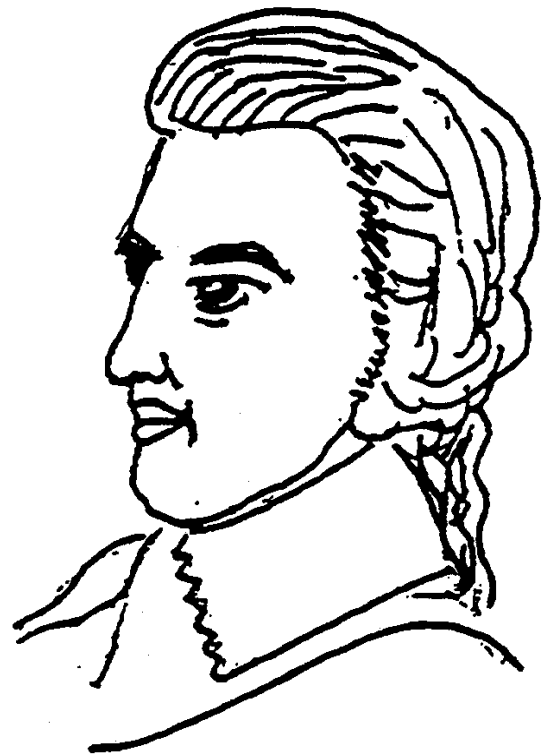
*John Hart*



*Francis  
Hopkinson*



*Francis Lewis*



*Arthur  
Middleton*



*Thomas Nelson Jr.*



*Richard Stockton*