

# ★ American Heritage Themes ★

## Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to develop meanings for the four important themes in American history--freedom, unity, progress, and responsibility. One theme is stressed in each of the lessons in the curriculum materials. The themes are drawn from the work of the Founding Fathers as they discussed the formation of the United States.

## Objective

1. The student will define freedom, unity, responsibility, and progress in American history.
2. The student will analyze and discuss how various quotations relate to these themes.
3. The student will illustrate the meaning of one selected theme.

## Theme

Americans are responsible for communicating to future generations a blueprint of the ideas of how the country was formed, gained freedom, and unified our citizens to progress toward a better life for ALL people.

## TEKS

U. S. History Social Studies Skills.  
U. S. History-Citizenship. Explain how participation in the democratic process reflects our national identity.  
U. S. Government-History. Explain major political ideas in history.

113.32.c.18 Citizenship. The student understands efforts to expand the democratic process.

113.32.c.19 Citizenship. The student understands the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society.

113.32.c.21 Culture. The student understands how people from racial, ethnic, and religious groups adapt to life in the U. S. and contribute to our national identity.

113.35.c.2 History. The student understands how constitutional government, as developed in the U. S., has been influenced by people, ideas, and historical documents.

## Time

60 minutes

## Materials

- ★ American Heritage Themes handout
- ★ American Heritage Themes templates
- ★ "From Oppression to Freedom" Essay (in Introduction)
- ★ Loyalty Day Proclamations
- ★ Art supplies (as needed)
- ★ Website - [www.americanheritage.org](http://www.americanheritage.org)

## Preparation

- ★ Copy American Heritage Themes handout for each student.
- ★ Copy American Heritage Themes templates (as needed).
- ★ Gather art supplies (as needed).
- ★ Expand the American Heritage Themes to poster size and post in room.

## Focus

Students are to develop the meaning of the four themes of American Heritage. Write the words freedom, unity, progress, and responsibility on the board. Ask students what they think each of the words mean, and write their responses near the word. Read one of the quotes from the handout about each one of the themes, and ask students how the quotes relate to the definitions the students have provided.

## **Activity**

Teachers may select one or more of these activities for their students.

1. Have groups of students develop a frieze to illustrate one of the themes. Each group may demonstrate and/or explain to the class their illustration.
2. Have students working individually or in groups use copies of the templates, art paper, or poster boards to illustrate the meaning of one or more of the themes. Students could use words, sentences, paragraphs, pictures, or quotations from the handout or from other sources. Student should consider the meaning of the themes for Americans today.
3. Have students develop a bumper sticker to illustrate the meaning of one or more of the themes.
4. Read/discuss the essay, “From Oppression to Freedom,” as a class. Have students individually or in groups analyze segments of the essay in order to understand its terms and meaning. Students can share and discuss their analyses with the rest of the class.
5. Read and discuss the main points and meaning of the excerpts from the Loyalty Day proclamations. Students may research the history of Loyalty Day in the U. S. Students may also read the American Heritage Month excerpt. Discuss the importance of recognizing, honoring, and being informed about America’s history and heritage. (See Links page on [www.americanheritage.org](http://www.americanheritage.org) for additional resources on Loyalty Day.)

## **Closure**

Remind students that freedom, unity, progress, and responsibility are themes from American history that are still important today.

The God who gave us life,  
gave us liberty at the same time.

**Thomas Jefferson**

1743-1826

There is nothing on this earth  
more glorious than a man's freedom, and  
no aim more elevated than liberty.

**Thomas Paine**

1737-1809

Is life so dear or peace so sweet,  
as to be purchased at the price  
of chains or slavery?  
Forbid it, Almighty God!  
I know not what course  
others may take, but as for me,  
give me liberty or give me death!

**Patrick Henry**

1736-1799

We must all hang together, or assuredly  
we shall all hang separately.

**Benjamin Franklin**

1706-1790

E PLURIBUS UNUM – From Many, One  
**The Great Seal of the United States**

1782

Be Americans.  
Let there be no sectionalism,  
no North, South, East or West:  
You are all dependent on one another  
and should be in union.  
In one word, be a nation:  
be Americans, and be true to yourselves.

**George Washington**

1732-1799

**Freedom**

**Unity**

**Progress**

**Responsibility**

**Freedom, unity, progress, and responsibility** are central themes in America's heritage that generations of Americans from various backgrounds have embraced for over two centuries.

This society of free, self-reliant individuals has brought about the greatest outburst of creative human energy ever known, producing more social, economic, and health advances than ever before in history—the miracle that is America. Yet there is more to do. The most rapid, permanent progress is achieved through individual freedom, education, productivity, and morality.

**Dr. Richard J. Gonzalez**

1912-1998

*The main fuel to speed our progress is our stock of knowledge, and the brake is our lack of imagination. The ultimate resource is people—skilled, spirited and hopeful people who will exert their wills and imaginations for their own benefit, and so, inevitably, for the benefit of all.*

**Julian Simon**

1932-1998

God grants liberty only to those who love it and are always ready to guard and defend it.

**Daniel Webster**

1782-1852

For, however loftily the intellect of man may have been gifted, however skillfully it may have been trained, if it be not guided by a sense of justice, a love of mankind, and a devotion to duty, its possessor is only a more splendid, as he is a more dangerous, barbarian.

**Horace Mann**

1796-1859

And so, my fellow Americans,  
ask not what your country can do for you;  
ask what you can do for your country.

**John F. Kennedy**

1917-1963

★ **American Heritage Themes** ★

***Freedom***

***Unity***

***Progress***

***Responsibility***

# ***The Theme is Freedom***

(excerpts)

**By M. Stanton Evans**

**Regenery Publishing Company, Washington, D. C., 1994**

If we want to find the sources of our freedom, we first need to know what freedom is, as Americans have historically defined it. Our definition of freedom in these pages means *the absence of coercion* to the extent that this is feasible in organized society. It means the ability of human beings to act in voluntary fashion, rather than being pushed around and forced to do things. Someone who does something of his own volition is free; someone forced to act at gunpoint isn't. This seems an obvious enough distinction, and, in an age disgraced by the totalitarian horror, a useful one to keep in focus.

It (freedom) means, for instance, the ability to decide things on a voluntary basis, but says nothing at all about *what* will be decided. This gives freedom a status of its own, a helpful feature if we want to compare or contrast it with other values. Even so, it comes attached with a proviso: Liberty to act on one's own behalf must be fenced off by the equal liberty of others, so that freedom for one individual doesn't become oppression for a second. Freedom in this sense must be mutual, so as not to contradict the basic premise.

Most important for our discussion, freedom thus defined also entails a certain kind of governing system. If a regime of liberty is to exist, some agency must forestall the use of force or fraud by which one person invades another's rights, render justice in doubtful cases, and provide a zone of order in which people may go about their affairs in safety. This agency is the government. Its basic job is to maintain the equal liberty of the people, by preventing various species of aggression. Likewise, for identical and fairly obvious reasons, government also must be precluded from violating freedom. Taken together, these concepts add up to the notion of the order-keeping state, which protects its citizens from hostile forces, but is itself restrained in the exertion of its powers.

Establishing such a regime of freedom is no easy matter, as it requires a proper balance between the requirements of liberty and those of order. Government needs sufficient power to do its job, but not too much--which would endanger freedom. The dilemma was summed up by Burke: "To make a government requires no great prudence. Settle the seat of power, teach obedience, and the work is done. To give freedom is still more easy. It is not necessary to guide; it only requires to let go of the rein. But to form a *free government*, to temper together these opposite elements of liberty and restraint in one consistent work, requires much thought, deep reflection, a sagacious, powerful, and combining mind."

Similar thoughts about the topic were expressed by the Founders of our republic. Indeed, Americans will have no trouble recognizing the view of government we have been describing, since in general outline it is our own: an emphasis on voluntary action, safeguards for individual rights, limits on the reach of power. The core ideas of American statecraft have been, precisely, that government exists to provide an arena of ordered liberty, but that government in turn must be prevented from violating freedom.

## Loyalty Day, 2003

A Proclamation (excerpts)

By the President of the United States of America

“To be an American is not a matter of blood or birth. Our citizens are bound by ideals that represent the hope of all mankind: that all men are created equal, endowed with unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. On Loyalty Day, we reaffirm our allegiance to our country and resolve to uphold the vision of our Forefathers....

...Our founding principles have endured, guiding our Nation toward progress and prosperity and allowing the United States to be a leader among nations of the world. Throughout our history, honorable men and women have demonstrated their loyalty to America by making remarkable sacrifices to preserve and protect these values....

...These values must be imparted to each new generation. Our children need to know that our Nation is a force for good in the world, extending hope and freedom to others. By learning about America’s history, achievements, ideas, and heroes, our young citizens will come to understand even more why freedom is worth protecting....”

GEORGE W. BUSH  
The White House  
Office of the Press Secretary  
April 30, 2003  
[www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

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## Loyalty Day, 2004

A Proclamation (excerpts)

By the President of the United States of America

“As Americans, we work to preserve the freedom declared by our Founding Fathers, defended by generations, and granted to every man and woman on Earth by the Almighty. On Loyalty Day, we are reminded that we are citizens with obligations to our country, to each other, and to our great legacy of freedom and democracy....

...We must continue to ensure that our young people know the great cause of freedom and why it is worth defending. Our Founders believed the study of history and citizenship should be at the core of every American’s education. By encouraging students to learn more about American history and values, we can help prepare the next generation of Americans to carry our heritage of freedom into the future....”

GEORGE W. BUSH  
The White House  
Office of the Press Secretary  
April 30, 2004  
[www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

# **CELEBRATE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH IN NOVEMBER!**

“American Heritage Month gives us all an opportunity to reflect on our roots as Americans from a fresh perspective. It is a time to remember that we Americans have brought with us many different heritages, but we have joined together in this country as one people. The Declaration of Independence sets forth our fundamental values, and the Constitution serves to protect those values. Our schools, teachers, students, and other citizens help preserve and strengthen the miracle that is America. As Thomas Jefferson said, ‘If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.’”

The American Heritage Education Foundation, Inc.

