

# ★ American Heritage Themes ★

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this lesson is to teach students the meaning of four important themes in American history — freedom, unity, progress, and responsibility. Students will analyze quotations related to the themes and then complete a writing or collage activity explaining or illustrating one or more of the themes.

## **Objective**

The student will explain the significance of freedom, unity, progress, and responsibility in American history.

## **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**

113.22.b.6.11 Government. The student understands the concepts of limited governments, such as constitutional and democratic governments....

113.22.b.6.13 Citizenship. The student understands that the nature of citizenship varies among societies.

113.22.b.6.14 Citizenship. The student understands the relationship among individual rights, responsibilities, and freedoms in democratic societies.

113.22.b.6.15 Culture. The student understands the similarities and differences within and among cultures in different societies.

SS8 History. Describe and analyze documents related to and reasons for the growth of representative government in the United States.

113.24.b.8.3 History. The student understands the foundations of representative government in the U. S.

113.24.b.18.16 Government. The student understands the American beliefs and principles reflected in the U. S. Constitution and other important historical documents.

113.24.b.8.20 Citizenship. The student understands the rights and responsibilities of citizens of the U. S.

## **Time**

60 minutes

## **Materials**

- ★ American Heritage Themes handouts
- ★ *The Theme is Freedom* excerpt
- ★ Loyalty Day Proclamations
- ★ Art supplies (as needed)
- ★ Website - [www.americanheritage.org](http://www.americanheritage.org)

## **Preparation**

- ★ Copy American Heritage Themes handouts for students.
- ★ Copy other handouts (as needed).
- ★ Gather art supplies (as needed).

## **Focus**

Write the word “freedom” on the board. Ask students what they think freedom means. Write student responses on the board. Repeat this activity for the words unity, progress, and responsibility. Tell students that these four words are important themes that appear in quotes of famous Americans throughout history.

## Activity

1. Read and discuss the quotations on the handout. Note vocabulary that may be unfamiliar. Discuss or have students research the context of the quotations and/or information about the individuals being quoted.
2. Have students working individually or in groups use copies of the templates, art paper, magazine and newspaper cutouts, and/or poster boards to illustrate the meaning of one or more of the themes. Students may use drawings, words, sentences, paragraphs, pictures, or quotations from the handout or other sources to illustrate their themes. Students should consider the meaning of the themes for Americans today. Students may then group posters on the same theme and unify their ideas to create a single poster. Display posters around the class, school, and area businesses.
3. Have students write compositions on the meaning of one or more themes. What does the theme word mean? What are some examples demonstrating the theme? What are some key words, synonyms, or quotes related to the theme? Students may refer to other sources like dictionaries, writings, examples, articles, stories, quotes, etc. to understand themes and then define themes in their own words. Students might write a paragraph for each theme, organizing their ideas in an outline, essay, or four-square grid format. Have students share their ideas in class presentation or discussion. Jot ideas on the board.
4. Students read, summarize, and discuss the meaning of the Loyalty Day proclamation excerpts. Students may research the history of Loyalty Day in the U. S. Students may also read the American Heritage Month excerpt. Discuss why it is important to learn about America and its 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 to Americans today.

### Assessment

Students will write an essay explaining the importance of freedom, unity, progress, and responsibility to Americans in the twenty-first century.



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.

