

## Winter 2009 Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly Learning Activity – Elementary Level

### The Declaration of Independence: Differentiated Learning Activity



#### **Declaration of Independence**

Baltimore, Maryland: Printed by Mary Katharine  
Goddard [1777]

Library of Congress Bibliographic record:  
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/bdsdcc.02101>

### OVERVIEW

#### Overview

The purpose of this activity is to engage students at various academic levels in examining the Declaration of Independence. Below-level/ELL students will review the historical setting and influential figures surrounding the writing of the Declaration. On-level students will examine parts of the document. Above-level students will compare wording from various source documents with key phrases from the Declaration. All learners will “rewrite” the Declaration of Independence as they evaluate alternative wording choices in the document, and later defend their decisions in class discussion.

#### Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- Explain the importance of the Declaration of Independence
- Identify and/or analyze key concepts put forth in the Declaration of Independence
- Evaluate alternative wording choices in the Declaration and defend their decisions

#### Time Required

Two class periods

#### Recommended Grade Range

4-5

#### Topic/s

United States History/Government

#### Subject

Social Studies, Language Arts (Reading)

#### Standards

McREL 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Standards & Benchmarks

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

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### OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

#### *Grades K-4 History*

**Standard 4.** Understands how democratic values came to be, and how they have been exemplified by people, events and symbols

#### *United States History*

**Standard 6.** Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory.

#### *Language Arts: Reading*

**Standard 7.** Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

#### *Language Arts: Listening and Speaking*

**Standard 8.** Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

#### *Thinking and Reasoning*

**Standard 6.** Applies decision-making techniques.

#### Credits

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### PREPARATION

#### Materials

Have these materials ready before the activity:

**Declaration of Independence** image (introduction to lesson)

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/bdsdcc.02101>

- Prepare to display the image for discussion either by printing or projecting

**Internet-ready computer for each student or pair of students**

- Set-up access to electronic versions of worksheets and the Library of Congress Web site

**Worksheets** (1 copy for each student, determined by academic ability level)

- There are 3 levels of activities/worksheets (below-level/ELL, on-level, above-level)

*Note: The above-level worksheet will require prior download of free Silverlight software from the Library's myloc.gov Web site to run the accompanying online activity.*

#### Resources

*America's Library*, Library of Congress Web site

<http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/aa>

*Creating the Declaration of Independence* online activity

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/creatingtheus/Pages/Interactives.aspx>

\*Requires Silverlight download

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*The Declaration of Independence: Rewriting the Rough Draft* online activity  
<http://myloc.gov/Education/OnlineActivities/ExhibitObjects/DecOfIndependenceOnlineActivity.aspx>

**PROCEDURE**

**Activating Prior Knowledge:**

1. Review what students remember about key events and influential figures from the Revolutionary War period.
2. Ask students to share what they know about founding documents. Possible questions include:  
What is a founding document? Why and when are founding documents written?
3. Show the image of the Declaration of Independence. Ask students to identify this document.
4. Discuss what students know about the Declaration of Independence. Possible questions include:  
Why was it written? When was it written? Who wrote it?
5. Explain that students will learn more about the Declaration of Independence in this activity by reading worksheets on the computer, using the worksheets' hyperlinks to access the Library of Congress Web site, and recording information on printed copies of the worksheets.

**Activity:**

1. Assign students to work at computers individually or in pairs.
2. Hand out the appropriate worksheets to students (based upon academic level):

Below-level/ELL learners: *Declaration of Independence* worksheet

- Students will access America's Library to learn about the roles that Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams played in writing the Declaration of Independence.

On-level learners: *This is It!* worksheet

- Students will read parts of the Declaration of Independence, examining important sections of the document.

Above-level learners: *Deep Down Declaration* worksheet

- Students will examine two of the five key phrases presented in the *Creating the Declaration of Independence* online activity. They will read source documents and choose the wording closest to Thomas Jefferson's draft.

\*Computers require free Silverlight download to run this online activity.

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3. Hand out copies of instructions for the online activity, *The Declaration of Independence: Rewriting the Rough Draft*, to all students upon completion of their worksheets.

All learners: *A Big Decision* directions

- Students will use the online activity to help edit Thomas Jefferson’s draft of the Declaration of Independence.

4. Remind students to keep in mind the message that the colonists hoped to deliver to King George III when choosing the wording for selected passages of the Declaration of Independence.

5. When all their edits are completed, ask students to select **Compare versions** and then select **Print** to create a document comparing their version of the Declaration of Independence to the final draft ratified by the Second Continental Congress.

6. As an entire class, discuss students’ discoveries about the Declaration of Independence. Ask students to explain and defend their word choices from *The Declaration of Independence: Rewriting the Rough Draft* online activity as part of the discussion.

#### EVALUATION

- Active engagement in online activities
- Accurate completion of worksheet
- Active, thoughtful participation in culminating class discussion

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence is an important document in the history of our country. We'll read about the Declaration and some of the people who influenced the beginnings of our new country.

Let's [meet some amazing Americans](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/aa).

[CTRL + click to follow link to <http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/aa> ]

- Select **U. S. Presidents**
- Select **Thomas Jefferson**

Read about Thomas Jefferson and then answer these questions.

1. Who was the main author of the Declaration of Independence?

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2. What other important jobs did Thomas Jefferson have in his lifetime?

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- Select the story about Thomas Jefferson with the title, **The Most Important Thing He Ever Wrote**. *Read all four pages.*

3. How do we know that Thomas Jefferson wrote more than one draft of the Declaration of Independence?

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4. Why did the other members of the Continental Congress choose Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence?

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5. What are the best-known words of the Declaration of Independence?

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6. Why was the Declaration of Independence written?

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7. What does the Declaration of Independence explain?

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8. What two big ideas did Thomas Jefferson believe in?

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Go back to **Meet Amazing Americans**

- Select **Leaders and Statesmen**
- Select **Benjamin Franklin**

Another man who was important during the time of the American Revolution was Benjamin Franklin. Benjamin Franklin was the only person to sign three important documents.

9. Which three documents did Benjamin Franklin sign?

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10. Why are these three documents so important?

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Go back to **Meet Amazing Americans**

- Select **U.S. Presidents**
- Select **John Adams**

John Adams was another very important person in our country's history.

11. What were two of John Adams's important government jobs?

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- Select another story, **Thomas Jefferson's Survives: Adams's Friend (and Rival)**. *Read all three pages.*

12. What committee was John Adams on while he was in the Continental Congress? What was this committee's job?

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13. What did Thomas Jefferson and John Adams have in common?

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14. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were the only two men who \_\_\_\_\_ and were elected

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Now use what you've read about the Declaration of Independence and some of the important people who helped to form our country to answer these questions.

15. Why is the Declaration of Independence important?

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16. How were Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams similar? \_\_\_\_\_

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17. How were Jefferson, Franklin and Adams different?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

## **This Is It!**

Each of the 13 colonies sent representatives to the Second Continental Congress to talk about issues that concerned them. These leaders wanted to help make life better for the colonists. Important discussions took place about the way that England was treating the colonies. Not everyone agreed on what to do. But after a lot of thinking and debating, the Congress asked five representatives, called the Committee of Five, to write a statement that told England's King George III that the colonies wanted to be their own country, not a British colony. The committee decided that Thomas Jefferson should write the declaration.

Look at a printed copy of the [Declaration of Independence](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/bdsdcc.02101).

[CTRL + click to follow link to <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/bdsdcc.02101> ]

- Click on the image to enlarge it.
- Look closely at the Declaration and then answer these questions.

1. What is a declaration? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. The Second Continental Congress did not call this document, "The Declaration of Independence." What did they call it?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the date at the top of this document? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What does the word "unanimous" mean? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Whose large signature is at the bottom of the Declaration? What was his role in the Continental Congress? How do you know?

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6. At the bottom of the Declaration, each colony is listed with its delegates to the Continental Congress. Why do you think some colonies sent more delegates than others?

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- Select **Back to Bibliographic Information**
- Select **View text**

Read the *introduction* of the Declaration of Independence (the first paragraph) and then answer these questions.

7. What do you think is the main idea of the first paragraph? What do the verbs “dissolve” and “entitle” mean?\_\_\_\_\_

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8. The second paragraph is about *human rights*. Read the first sentence of the second paragraph. Write this sentence in your own words. Use context clues to help you understand words you may not know.

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The last sentence in that paragraph seems to be saying to the world, “Listen up and we’ll tell you why we want to be free of British rule.”

9. The first two paragraphs are followed by a *list of complaints*. In your own words, write at least five complaints listed in the Declaration that help to explain why the colonists wanted independence from England.

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10. The last paragraph states what the Second Continental Congress wanted. What words appear more than once in all capital letters to show that they were *declaring freedom*?

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11. The closing sentence states, “...we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honour.” What do you think this meant to these representatives? What were they promising to each other? What problems or dangers might they face because of this promise?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Deep Down Declaration

The principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence originated from English, Scottish and American documents. Let's learn about the wording in these documents that Thomas Jefferson considered as he wrote the [Declaration of Independence](#).

[CTRL + click to follow link to <http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/creatingtheus/Pages/Interactives.aspx> ]

- Select **Silverlight version**
- Select **Overview** from the menu at the top of the page

First, read the Overview that appears in the left sidebar.

Next, notice the five phrases from the Declaration of Independence listed across the top of the document:

“Pursuit of Happiness,” “Consent of the Governed,”  
“All Men are Created Equal,” “Train of Abuses,” and, “Slavery”

- Select two of these five phrases to explore in depth. For each phrase you choose, follow these guidelines:

- Copy the phrase on your worksheet.
- Read the left sidebar for background information.
- Click on **Transcribe** for a printed copy of the phrase.
- At the bottom of the left sidebar, select **Where did this come from?**
- List the source documents for this phrase.
- Read the wording on each source document.
- Choose the wording that is closest to the Declaration of Independence.
- Why do you think Thomas Jefferson chose that wording for his document?
- Be prepared to discuss your findings with your classmates.

Let's begin!

Phrase: \_\_\_\_\_

Source documents: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Wording that most closely matches that of the Declaration:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think Thomas Jefferson chose this wording?

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Phrase: \_\_\_\_\_

Source documents: \_\_\_\_\_

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Wording that most closely matches that of the Declaration:

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think Thomas Jefferson chose this wording?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## A Big Decision

Now let's travel back in time to the year 1776. Imagine that you are in the room with the Second Continental Congress as they are reading Thomas Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence. Peek over their shoulders as they do some editing. Let's see if you would have agreed with their edited word choice or if you would have chosen

### [Thomas Jefferson's words.](http://myloc.gov/Education/OnlineActivities/ExhibitObjects/DecOfIndependenceOnlineActivity.aspx)

[CTRL + click to follow link to

<http://myloc.gov/Education/OnlineActivities/ExhibitObjects/DecOfIndependenceOnlineActivity.aspx> ]

- Select **Launch Activity**
- Select **Start**

You will see a draft of the Declaration of Independence with conversation bubbles on it.

- Select one of the bubbles.

You will see two word choices: Thomas Jefferson's original and the Second Continental Congress' final draft.

- Select the wording that you think best represents what the colonists hoped for as they prepared to send this document to King George III.
- Select **Submit**

Repeat this for each of the conversation bubbles.

When finished, you can view your copy of the Declaration next to the document that was approved by the Second Continental Congress.

The wording choices are highlighted in red.

- **Print** this page.

Be prepared to defend your choice of words in class as we engage in a debate that may be similar to what happened in the meeting of the Second Continental Congress in 1776.