



The Declaration of Independence | Lesson Plan

What is the Declaration of Independence, and how did it establish our nation?

Students will explain the relevance of the principles outlined in the Declaration of Independence, such as unalienable rights, consent of the governed, and equality, to contemporary American society and government.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify key facts about the Declaration of Independence.
- Describe the reasons for declaring independence from Great Britain.
- Distinguish the key elements of the Declaration of Independence, including unalienable rights, consent of the governed, and equality of man.
- Enumerate man's unalienable rights as stated in the Declaration of Independence.
- Evaluate the significance and uniqueness of the Declaration of Independence in history.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Unalienable Rights:** These are fundamental rights that every individual inherently possesses, which cannot be rightfully taken away or given up. The Founding Fathers of the United States believed that these rights are endowed by the Creator and are essential to human nature. The most notable of these, as stated in the Declaration of Independence, are "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." These rights form the philosophical basis for the government's primary role: to protect and uphold the freedoms and dignity of its citizens.
- **Declaration:** A formal statement that declares the rights, grievances, and intentions of a group of people.
- **Consent of the Governed:** A phrase meaning that true power rests with the people of a country, and they must give their permission or agreement for the government to exist and make decisions on their behalf.
- **Self-Evident:** A truth that is clear without needing proof or explanation, used in the Declaration to describe the truths of human rights and equality.
- **Equal:** The inherent and universal dignity that all human beings possess, irrespective of their status, race, or creed. This equality is not about physical or intellectual similarity but about the equal right to certain unalienable rights. This principle asserts that no one is naturally superior to another in the rights to freedom and justice, as these are endowed equally to all by their Creator.

Educational Standards: CCRA.R.1, CCRA.R.2, CCRA.R.3, CCRA.R.4, CCRA.W.9, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.4, CCRA.L.3, CCRA.I.4

Academic Subject Areas: Civics, U.S. History, Western Civilization, Political Science, Liberty, Freedom

Scan to watch episode:



What You'll Need

- Video: *Street Smarts: Declaration of Independence* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Street Smarts: Declaration of Independence* (Click [Here](#))
- A copy of the Declaration of Independence for each student
- Highlighters or colored pencils for each student

Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

Warm-Up: (15 minutes)

1. Start with a discussion on what makes America unique, emphasizing that it was founded on specific ideas.
2. Pose a thought-provoking question:
 - If America is founded on principles, what might some of these core ideas be?
3. Guide the students to think about unalienable rights and the concept of government deriving its power from the consent of the governed.
4. Provide each student with a copy of the Declaration of Independence. Explain that the document not only proclaimed independence from Britain but also established foundational principles about human rights and governance. Add that the Declaration of Independence includes a fundamental statement about human rights that the Founding Fathers believed were intrinsic to all people.
5. Ask students to find and highlight the following specific section: "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."
6. Briefly discuss the philosophical background of these ideas, touching on Enlightenment influences and the concept of natural rights as seen in the Declaration of Independence. Clarify that this passage is crucial because it declares the belief in unalienable rights that are considered inherent and universal and granted to all humans by virtue of their existence.
7. Instruct students to read through the list of grievances outlined against King George III in the Declaration. Ask them to carefully examine each one and highlight two or three that they find particularly significant or interesting. Allow students to share their findings with the class and voice thoughts or questions they might have about the grievances.
8. Hand out the "Street Smarts: The Declaration of Independence Worksheet" and prepare the episode for display.

Watch and Complete (20 minutes)

1. Watch the video *Street Smarts: The Declaration of Independence*. Pause after each segment to fill in the worksheet and discuss the answers, ensuring comprehension of key facts, dates, and concepts.

2. After each pause, discuss how the concepts presented in the video (like unalienable rights and the consent of the governed) relate to the initial discussion about America's founding principles.

Wrap-Up (10 minutes)

1. Invite students to reflect on why the Declaration of Independence is considered revolutionary. Encourage them to think about how the ideas in the Declaration might apply to current events or issues.
2. Ask students to consider how understanding these founding principles affects their view of what it means to be an American today.
3. Share that The Declaration of Independence stands as a beacon of liberty, not only proclaiming the birth of a nation but also pioneering a vision of governance rooted in the unalienable rights of every individual—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It was the first document of its kind to assert that the government's legitimacy comes from the consent of the governed, inspiring countless people around the world to strive for freedom and democracy.
4. Assessment: Collect the completed worksheets to assess understanding and engagement.

Don't have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (20 minutes)

Distribute the worksheet and allow students to complete it while they follow along with the video.