



The Declaration of Independence II | Lesson Plan

How do the philosophical foundations of the Declaration of Independence, define natural human rights?

Students will learn the philosophical underpinnings of The Declaration of Independence and its lasting impact on the nation and the world.

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze the historical context and philosophical ideas leading to the Declaration of Independence.
- Examine the Declaration of Independence's historical and philosophical foundations and its effects on the formation of the American government and legal systems.
- Evaluate the role of the Declaration in shaping the principles of governance and individual freedoms in the United States.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Social contract:** An agreement where people give up some freedoms to create governments that protect their rights and maintain order. John Locke's ideas on social contract theory, including the need for the consent of the governed, influenced the Declaration, asserting that the government's power comes from serving the people.
- **Consent of the governed:** The idea that a government's power comes from the people's approval, typically through voting. Another of John Locke's philosophies.
- **Natural rights:** Universal rights inherent to all humans, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. John Locke argued that these natural rights must be protected by governments.
- **Tyranny:** Cruel and oppressive government rule.
- **Grievances:** Formal complaints against authority for perceived wrongs.
- **Treason:** The crime of betraying one's country, especially by attempting to overthrow the government.

Educational Standards: CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.L.5, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.R.1, CCRA.R.4, CCRA.R.6, CCRA.W.2

Academic Subject Areas: Political Science, Civics, America

What You'll Need

- Video: *Street Smarts: The Declaration of Independence II* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Street Smarts: The Declaration of Independence II* (Click [Here](#))

Scan to watch episode:



Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

Warm Up: (15 minutes)

1. Begin by laying out this scenario to the class:
 - Imagine you and your classmates are part of a student organization at your school. Recently, the school administration has introduced several new rules without consulting students. These rules include a strict dress code, limits on eating sugary foods, and restrictions on student-led clubs. Many students feel these rules are unfair, especially since they weren't given a chance to voice their opinions or suggest alternatives.
 - As a group, you decide to draft a formal statement to present to the school administration. This statement will outline your grievances against the new rules and demand that students be given more say in decisions that affect their daily lives. You base your statement on the principles of freedom, representation, and the right to be heard—similar to how the Founding Fathers used these ideas in the Declaration of Independence.
2. Ask students to provide answers to these discussion questions:
 - How would you articulate your grievances to ensure your voices are heard?
 - What principles from the Declaration of Independence can you apply when drafting your statement?
 - Why is it important for people to have a say in decisions that impact them?
3. Transition to the background circumstances surrounding the writing of the Declaration of Independence. Explain that it was written by Thomas Jefferson in 1776 in response to several grievances imposed upon the colonies by King George III of England. The colonies had had their fill of tyranny and declared independence from British rule.
4. Relate to students each of the following facts regarding the Declaration of Independence:
 - The Declaration asserts that God created all men to be free and that any government is meant to protect this natural right.
 - Signing the Declaration was an act of treason against Britain, requiring immense courage. The Founding Fathers were willing to risk their lives for independence.
 - The Declaration lists 27 grievances against King George III, illustrating why the colonists justified their pursuit of independence. The top grievance was taxation without representation, but another significant grievance was the denial of the right to trial by jury.
 - Several ideas converged in the creation of the Declaration. John Locke's philosophical concepts, such as the social contract and the consent of the governed, played a crucial role. Additionally, the Magna Carta, a 13th-century document, influenced its principles.
 - Passing the Declaration wasn't easy. When Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee introduced a motion to declare independence on June 7, 1776, it

sparked heated debate in the Continental Congress, which ultimately led to the Declaration being signed on July 4, 1776.

- John Adams, a Founding Father and future president, played a major role in getting the Declaration passed in Congress.
5. Explain to the students that they will next have the opportunity to test their knowledge about the Declaration of Independence in a game show-style video.
 6. 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 II*. Pause after each segment to allow students time to fill in the worksheet and discuss their answers, ensuring they comprehend key facts, dates, and concepts.
2. After each pause, discuss how the concepts presented in the video (such as taxation without representation, the grievances against King George III, and the act of treason) relate to the initial discussion about governance, representation, and individual rights. Emphasize how the Founding Fathers’ actions and the Declaration’s principles are foundational to American identity and democracy.

Wrap-Up: (10 minutes)

1. Invite students to reflect on why the Declaration of Independence is considered a revolutionary document. Encourage them to think about how the Declaration’s ideas, like the social contract and the consent of the governed, continue to influence modern democratic societies.
2. Ask students to consider how understanding these founding principles impacts their view of what it means to be an American today, especially in light of current events and ongoing debates about rights and governance.
3. Close by sharing with the students that the Declaration of Independence not only marked the birth of the United States but also set forth a groundbreaking vision of government rooted in the protection of natural rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The document was among the first to claim that a government's legitimacy stems from the consent of the governed, inspiring freedom movements around the world.

Don't have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (15 minutes)

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