

From the Declaration of Independence to the Declaration of Sentiments

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Description

Students will learn about the purpose and message of Declaration of Independence, question and discover if women had rights in Early America and analyze and compare the Declaration of Sentiments and its message and purpose.

Grade Level: 9th-12th

Time: Two to three 45/50-minute class periods. If you are crunched for time, you can cut steps 4 and 5
Ideas for how to plan:

- **Option 1:** Pace the lesson over 90-180 minutes without homework
- **Option 2:** DAY 1: Declaration of Independence background and discussion (step 1), DOI close read for homework (step 2); DAY 2: DOI discussions as bell activity the next class (step 3), step 4 and 5; DAY 3: step 6-8
- **Option 3:** DAY 1: Declaration of Independence background and discussion (step 1), DOI close read for homework (step 2), DOI discussions (step 3), step 4 and 5 for homework; DAY 2: step 6-8

Objectives

Answer Essential Historical Questions

- What was the original intent of publishing the Declaration of Independence and how/why have its words launched reform movements throughout US history?
- Were women in Early America free? Did the treatment of women in 19th century America live up to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence? Defend your position.
- Was the Seneca Falls Convention effective in its mission? Explain your position.

Materials:

- Document A: Declaration of Independence
- "Women's Rights in Early America" timeline
- [Evidence collection worksheet for the timeline](#)
- Document B: The Declaration of Sentiments
- [The Declaration of Sentiments graphic organizer](#)
- A projector to play a video clip

Prerequisites:

Background information for the teacher (step 1):

Depending on your course curriculum, students may only have a middle school understanding of the Declaration of Independence. Therefore, it is advised to check for understanding, inform students, provide clarification and debunk common myths before you begin the lesson.

Declaration of Independence Background

The Declaration of Independence is a work of more than just one man (Thomas Jefferson) and it is not the first Declaration of Independence, many colonies and communities adopted their own declarations of Independence between April and July of 1776 and many became the preambles to newly drafted state constitutions. It was a rapid transition for American colonists to go from being proud British citizens to proclaiming independence. American colonists believed themselves to be equal to citizens living in Britain and they were proud of British freedoms that existed. However, when direct taxes were imposed on American colonists and trade laws were more tightly enforced after the French and Indian War, American colonists found these actions to be unconstitutional because they did not have direct representation in the British Parliament. From there, a fight over what kind of representation colonists had and should have played out in public fashion back and forth across the Atlantic.

Colonial political and business leaders went through steps to petition the government for change but were met with disrespect and seemingly harsh consequences. Intellectuals, religious leaders and writers in America progressively became more radical in their anger toward Parliament. The Second Continental Congress was still trying to make amends with the British Empire when it sent the Olive Branch Petition to King George III in July of 1775. In the petition, the Continental Congress insisted that they did not desire independence and a war could be avoided if the King used his powers to intervene in the unconstitutional decisions of Parliament. However, the King refused to receive their petition and determined that the colonies did want independence. On June 11, 1776 a committee of five was nominated (Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman and Robert R. Livingston) to draft a national Declaration of Independence on behalf of Congress. On June 28, the committee presented its draft to all of Congress for comment and votes, but decisions were delayed while they assessed the oncoming British Naval attack. The Declaration blames the King in its grievances because by June of 1776, Congress had declared that British Parliament had no authority over them because the colonies had no direct representation; therefore, their last connection to the empire and the last person whom they had maintained loyalty to was the King. They argued that King George III was a tyrant following precedent in English history with former monarchs who were disavowed. Thomas Jefferson was the main drafter of the Declaration of Independence, but his words and ideas were inspired by a vast knowledge of British history, British common law, Enlightenment thinkers, Greek and Roman history and literature, works of Christianity and other Virginians, like George Mason. When Congress finally decided to review the draft, they had many changes and removed entire sections which Jefferson was very unhappy about, but many historians believe the public document that we know is more clear, correct and powerful.

Class discussion after background: *What was the purpose of writing a national Declaration of Independence? Who was the intended audience?*

Answers:

- Prove that there was no alternative to declaring independence
- Unification/motivation for colonies and people to fight
- To dissolve all political relationships between the British Empire and the 13 mainland American colonies
- Declare themselves a nation, not just rebels and which opened up the opportunity for them to write their own government
- Appeal to potential foreign allies

Does this information change the way you think about the document, why?

*For more reading on the DOI, see *America Scripture: Making of the Declaration of Independence* by Pauline Maier.

Procedures:

1. Teach students about the Declaration of Independence (DOI) and lead a short discussion about the purpose of the document (see Background information and discussion topics near the end of this lesson plan procedures).
2. Ask students to do a close read of the preamble of the DOI, skim through the grievances and close read the conclusion.
 - a. If you don't have the resources to give students a hard copy to annotate, have them download a Word version to type on and highlight. It is also possible to use Google documents to do this close read process.
 - b. *Suggested annotations:*
 - i. Underline motivational passages that serve the purpose of the document
 - ii. Circle or highlight potentially hypocritical or problematic passages based on what they know about American history
 - iii. Write three questions you have about content or purpose
 - iv. Star passages that you think are still relevant or important today
3. Pair two students together (ex. shoulder partners, assigned pairs, etc.) and have them discuss their annotations and findings. After about five minutes discuss as a class.
 - a. *Discussion questions:*
 - i. "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." Was this statement meant for all Americans, explain? **Only meant for men who could vote—basically that no man is born with more inherited power than other (like a divine king), we should choose our leaders, people have natural rights*
 - ii. How has the DOI been interpreted throughout US history? Has its' purpose or use changed? For whom?
4. Pass out or instruct students to open the "Women's Rights in Early America" timeline and a hard copy of the [evidence collection worksheet](#). Ask students, with their partner, to read the timeline and collect evidence as they read that supports the claim that women did have rights in Early America and the claim that women did not have rights or power. Bullet point format is ok, but students should include enough detail and dates to use in a position statement.

5. Pose the question for discussion, “Were women in Early America free? Did the treatment of women in 19th century America live up to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence?” Ask students to write a short paragraph using evidence they collected, then have a short class discussion.
6. Play the 2:37 minute clip “Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Stronghold of the Fortress” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFdoHJnmR_U for the class on a projector. It provides an introduction about Elizabeth Cady Stanton and how and why the Seneca Falls Convention was organized.
7. Pass out Document B: The Declaration of Sentiments (or ask the students to download it) and a hard copy of the [Declaration of Sentiments graphic organizer](#) for each student. Students should close read the document and work on the graphic organizer with their partner. The knowledge from the timeline should help them better interpret the document.
8. Exit slip or exit activity: Ask students to write a response to the question “Was the Seneca Falls Convention effective in its mission? Explain your position.” Or, you could ask students to stand on one side of the room if they believe the document was effective and the other side if they believe it was not and have a full class discussion. Teacher may assess the big idea paragraphs/discussion alone or choose to collect the graphic organizer and evidence collection, too to check for understanding. The essential questions would make great essay questions in a formal assessment.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5

Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

Document A

Declaration of Independence: A Transcription

Source: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

Note from the Archives: The following text is a transcription of the Stone Engraving of the parchment Declaration of Independence (the document on display in the Rotunda at the National Archives Museum.) The spelling and punctuation reflects the original.

In Congress, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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. - That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Document B

Declaration of Sentiments

Woman's Rights Convention, held at Seneca Falls, New York

July 19-20, 1848

By Elizabeth Cady Stanton

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners.

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes of divorce; in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given; as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women—the law, in all cases, going upon the false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration.

He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction, which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education—all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in Church as well as State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the Church.

He has created a false public sentiment, by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated but deemed of little account in man.

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and her God.

He has endeavored, in every way that he could to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation,—in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States.