

*Thomas Jefferson
Creating the Declaration of Independence*

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Background Information:

U.S. Government and 12th graders.

Our school uses a twenty-nine day block system with Monday through Thursday used for instruction. Fridays are reserved for remedial and tutorial work. Our class periods are one hundred forty minutes in length, which allows us to go in-depth for our core teaching concepts. The school year consists of five blocks.

Woods High School is an alternative school and for many students this might be their last chance to graduate. A number of our students are single parents trying to raise one or more children by themselves. Others dropped out of traditional large high schools and have now decided to return to complete their studies. Finally, some might have had run-ins with the juvenile justice system with regular parole officer visits. Because of the nature of our students, Woods High School strives to maintain class sizes of 20-25 students. A typical class will have 3-4 students with IEPs, 5-7 students transitioning from ESL, and often the remainder are just struggling to catch up academically. It is a true challenge for our students, but they are committed to graduate. For many, they are the first generation in their family to have the opportunity to complete high school. We strongly encourage our students to look beyond graduation for opportunities in community college, university, technical schools, military, etc.

My school is predominantly Hispanic (approximately 90%) with many students performing several grades below standards. Many of my students come to class with many apprehensions, half-facts, and often distorted views of American government. They are also eager to learn how they will fit into American culture and contribute to our national identity.

Language acquisition is a critical component and we use a great deal of vocabulary to improve students' comprehension. However, I believe the basis for real learning and understanding for all students is by "doing." When students create a product/project to demonstrate learning, it stimulates creative thought and the intrinsic motivation needed to pursue and to apply new knowledge. Each block, my students must produce a capstone project, which they work on throughout the block. The students have the option of working alone or in teams of two or three.

As the classroom teacher, I present the necessary content materials as the launching pad for my student's projects, but encourage them to expand beyond our basic state standards. They are required to incorporate technology with their coursework, while familiarizing themselves with the internet, utilizing Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Excel, Power Point, Publisher), and basic web page design.

Timeline: 2 days

Goal: Understand that the Declaration of Independence was a major shift in political thought, which led to the physical struggle for freedom, and embodies the core beliefs of the Enlightenment as interpreted by Thomas Jefferson.

Arizona State Standards:

Concept 1: Foundations of Government

PO 3. Describe the philosophical roots of American Democracy:

- a. John Locke and social contract
- b. Charles de Montesquieu and separation of powers

PO 4. Examine the fundamental principles in the Declaration of Independence (e.g., equality, natural rights of man, rule of law).

PO 6. Examine the experiences and perspectives of the following groups in the new nation:

- a. property owners
- b. African Americans
- c. women
- d. Native Americans
- e. indentured servants

Content/Concept:

Describe the aspirations, ideals, and events that served as the foundation for the creation of a new national government, with emphasis on Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence.

Start with the premise from the political columnist, George Will that "George Washington fought for the revolution. Thomas Jefferson thought for the revolution."

Learning Objectives (SWBAT):

1. Explain the key events that led to the creation of the Declaration of Independence.
2. Describe the necessary skills that Jefferson needed to create such a powerful document.
3. Identify how Jefferson used the ideas of others (i.e. John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu) in developing the Declaration of Independence.
4. Interpret the changing meaning of key phrases in the Declaration from 1776 to the present.
5. Assess whether Jefferson's personal life lived up to the ideals as expressed in the Declaration.

6. Discuss how the Declaration has been “reinvented” in our own history and that of other nations to define the rights of humanity.

Instructional Resources:

1) DVD: *Declare Yourself: Declaration of Independence (approximately 20 minutes)*

Available for viewing online:

<http://www.independenceroadtrip.org/Curriculum/watch.html>

2) *Appendices: Primary Documents*

Appendix A – Jefferson’s rough draft copy

Appendix B – Transcribed rough draft with notes & changes

Appendix C – Dunlap Broadside

Appendix D – Virginia Declaration of Rights

Appendix E - Letter to Richard Henry Lee from John Adams

Appendix F - Thomas Jefferson referred to Locke’s work

Building Background:

Students will have completed work on concepts found in the Magna Carta, Petition of Right, and English Bill of Rights as key components of the colonial governments.

Activities/Strategies:

Day 1

- Begin with a KWL chart. Students will have 5-10 minutes to list at least five things in each column “What I know” and “What I want to know” about Thomas Jefferson and the creation of the Declaration of Independence.
- Students will share their thoughts on the white board. The class will compile a master list of the “What I know” items as well as “What I want to know.” I have a student write the core ideas on the board for all to students to review and a second student to write these down for my use as we progress through the unit. We will refer back to our original concepts as well as the class or lesson objectives. (Allow 10-15 minutes to set the stage)
- As a class we then review the overall objectives and discuss how we will achieve these goals. Discussion will often involve the action-learning verbs and how students may best demonstrate their mastery of the materials. (Allow 5-10 minutes)
- Students will receive a Power Point note sheet, which includes the pictures, headings, and an occasional prompt, but most of the form is blank. My students are not actively engaged if provided with a completed handout sheet so they must follow along and summarize the main points. Students who need extra time are encouraged to do their best and at the end they may refer to the master note sheets to fill in missing information.
- Show the Power Point presentation “Thomas Jefferson: Creating the Declaration of Independence.” (Allow 35-45 minutes) Obviously, this presentation allows the teacher to modify and adjust as needed for a particular class.
- After the Power Point we would take a 5-7 minute break.

- Critical analysis of the Appendices would now begin. Students would use their textbooks to compare the completed Declaration with the draft versions. In groups of 2-3 students they would evaluate the various documents and develop a list of at least five similarities, five differences, and five areas or sections, which they would like additional explanation. Students would receive activity points based on a simple rubric I use in my class. Their responses would be written on large sheets of butcher paper. (Allow 25-30 minutes as needed for students to discuss the various sections.)
- Discuss the student's conclusions-similarities, differences and problem areas. Emphasize the three ideas of equality, natural rights of man, and rule of law. Define these to the students, show them where they are in the documents, and discuss the meaning in 1776 versus how it might have changed in two hundred years. (Allow 20-30 minutes)
- Students would receive a sheet with the written assignment for Day 2. Their task would be to write a rough draft for a Declaration of Rights for Teenagers. They would need to have compose an introduction stating their purpose (1-2 paragraphs), list their declarations (at least five items and explanations), and any wrongs, injustices, or other items they would like to include (at least five items). They will share these with the class on Day 2.

Day 2

- Students will present their ideas as conceived in the rough drafts. We will discuss how they came up with their ideas, the impact they would have on our society, and if this would resolve issues in our society. (20-30 minutes)
- Students would then be asked to open their texts to the Declaration of Independence. They will watch a DVD called "*Declare Yourself: Declaration of Independence*" where contemporary actors read or perform the Declaration. As they listen to the reading, they will be able to follow along in their texts. (Allow 20-30 minutes) The DVD may be purchased or viewed online with a high speed internet connection.

Because of the unique presentation, students actively listen and follow along with great interest. The presentation breathes life into the Declaration for many students. Many of my students are newly arrived immigrants and they often find some deeper meanings to the film.

- After the DVD we would take a 5-7 minute break.
 - Discuss the core concepts in the Declaration from the three sections below:
(Allow 30 minutes)
- 1.) 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.
 - 2.) 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.

3.) 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.

- Discuss how the Declaration has been “reinvented” in our own history and that of other nations to define the rights of humanity. Individuals will read aloud to the class the following passages to further our discussion:

The principal leader of the first Women’s Rights Convention, held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted a declaration modeled after the Declaration of Independence and read it at the convention.

“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 unalienable 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...”

On September 22, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln, in a grand application of the Declaration of Independence, extended

American ideals of equality to African Americans by announcing that emancipation—the end of slavery—would become effective January 1, 1863.

“That on the 1st day of January, A.D. 1863, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.... And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.”

Black abolitionist and orator Frederick Douglass gave this speech at a meeting sponsored by the Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society, held on July 5, 1852, in Rochester, New York.

“Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?... This Fourth [of] July is

yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak today?... Fellow-citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday are, today, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them.... My subject, then fellow-citizens is AMERICAN SLAVERY. I shall see, this day, and its popular characteristics, from the slave’s point of view. Standing there, identified with the American bondman, making his wrongs mine, I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and the conduct of this nation never looked

On November 19, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln addressed the nation during the Civil War.

“Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure... this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.”

Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. addressed the crowd assembled in Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963.

"When the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men—yes, black men as well as white men—would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness... I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'"

Leader of the Nez Percé Indians from 1871 until his death in 1904, Chief Joseph spoke out against the injustice of the U.S. policy toward his people and hoped that America's promise of freedom and equality might someday be extended to Native Americans.

"I have heard talk and talk but nothing is done. Good words do not last long unless they amount to something.... If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian he can live in peace. There need be no trouble. Treat all men alike. Give them the same laws. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it.... I only ask of the Government to be treated as all other men are treated.... Let me be a free man—free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think, talk and act for myself—and I will obey every law or submit to the penalty. Whenever the white man treats the Indian as they treat each other, then we shall have no more wars. We shall be all alike brothers of one father and mother, with one sky above us and one country around us, and one government for all..."

Approved and adopted by the National Assembly of France on August 26, 1789, the Declaration of Man was modeled after the Declaration of Independence. In fact, the first draft of the French document was written by the Marquis de Lafayette, who aided Americans in our revolution.

"The representatives of the French people, organized as a National Assembly, believing that the ignorance, neglect or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man, in order that this declaration, being constantly before all members of the Social body, shall remind them continually of their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative power, as well as those of the executive power, may be compared at any moment with the objects and purposes of all political institutions and may thus be more respected, and, lastly, in order that the grievances of the citizens, based hereafter on simple and incontestable principles, shall tend to the maintenance of the constitution and redound to the happiness of all. Therefore, the National Assembly recognizes and proclaims, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and of the citizen:

Articles

- 1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.*
- 2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.*
- 3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation."*

Alternate Strategies:

Day 2 Alternate Assignment

Thomas Jefferson used several sources to compose the Declaration of Independence. On a separate sheet of paper, use words, drawings, and magazine cutouts to create a collage that expresses your personal ideas of freedom. Be sure to illustrate the freedoms that are most important to you, and indicate the works of literature, music, or art that influenced your composition.

Evaluation/Assessment:

- 1) Complete Equality Time Capsule Worksheet
- 2) Write a five paragraph essay, describing what you believe the significance and meaning of the Declaration of Independence is for our nation today. Has the Declaration of Independence fulfilled its intended purpose?
- 3) Have students pull out their KWL charts. Lead a discussion of what the students have learned in this lesson. Have them individually complete their own charts and turn in for teacher's review.

Appendix/Bibliography:

Books

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