



Day 21-22 American Revolution

Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence: Ideas, Division, and Impact

Grade Level: 5–8

Time: Two class periods (60–70 minutes each)

Unit: American Revolution

Lesson Overview

This two-day lesson examines the Declaration of Independence as both a revolutionary document and a response to deep colonial divisions. Students analyze the ideas behind the Declaration using a teacher-led PowerPoint presentation, a supporting article, and an interactive scavenger hunt module. They then apply their understanding through a creative historical narrative and targeted reading comprehension activities.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain why the Declaration of Independence was written
- Identify Patriot and Loyalist perspectives connected to the document
- Analyze the main ideas and grievances in the Declaration
- Apply historical understanding through interactive analysis and creative writing

Materials

- Declaration of Independence PowerPoint (anchor)

- Teacher article: **Declaration of Independence**
- **Declaration of Independence Interactive Module & Scavenger Hunt**
- Narrative reading: *The \$4 Declaration*
- Printable narrative writing prompt
- Declaration of Independence reading comprehension activities

DAY ONE

Day One Focus

Why the Declaration Was Written & What It Says

Introduction (5 minutes)

Begin by reminding students that the American colonies were deeply divided before independence. Explain that the Declaration of Independence was not written suddenly, but grew out of years of conflict between Patriots and Loyalists.

Anchor Activity: PowerPoint Presentation

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/revwar/doi.pptx>

Declaration of Independence (25–30 minutes)

Below is a **teacher script** for each slide.

Slide 1 – The Declaration of Independence

Teacher Script:

“Today we are going to study one of the most important documents in American history—the Declaration of Independence. This document explains why the colonies believed they had the right to break away from Great Britain and form their own nation.”

Slide 2 – Colonial America Before 1776

Teacher Script:

“Before 1776, colonists were divided. Patriots believed Britain was treating them unfairly, while Loyalists believed staying loyal to the king was safer and more stable. These disagreements often caused tension in families and communities.”

Slide 3 – Patriots vs. Loyalists

Teacher Script:

“Patriots and Loyalists viewed the same situation very differently. Patriots believed their rights were being violated and that self-government was necessary. Loyalists feared that rebellion would lead to chaos and violence.”

Slide 4 – Why the Declaration Was Written

Teacher Script:

“The Declaration of Independence was written to explain why the colonies were breaking away. It was meant to justify independence not just to Britain, but also to other colonies and foreign nations.”

Slide 5 – Who Wrote the Declaration

Teacher Script:

“Thomas Jefferson wrote most of the Declaration, but it was edited and approved by the Continental Congress. The ideas in the document were influenced by Enlightenment thinkers who believed in natural rights and limited government.”

Slide 6 – Core Idea: Natural Rights

Teacher Script:

“One of the most famous ideas in the Declaration is that all people are born with natural rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The document argues that governments exist to protect these rights.”

Slide 7 – Complaints Against the King

Teacher Script:

“This section lists specific grievances against King George III. These complaints connect directly to Patriot arguments, such as taxation without representation and interference with colonial self-government.”

Slide 8 – Loyalist Perspective

Teacher Script:

“Loyalists did not agree with these arguments. Many believed these problems could be solved peacefully and feared that independence would bring war and instability.”

Slide 9 – What the Declaration Did

Teacher Script:

“The Declaration officially announced independence. It united the colonies, encouraged foreign support, and turned a protest movement into a revolution.”

Slide 10 – Long-Term Importance

Teacher Script:

“The ideas in the Declaration influenced later documents like the Constitution and inspired democratic movements around the world.”

Slide 11 – A Divided Society

Teacher Script:

“Even after the Declaration, not everyone supported independence. The Revolution was also a civil conflict, with Loyalists facing punishment or exile.”

Slide 12 – From Words to a Nation

Teacher Script:

“The Declaration shows that ideas and arguments were just as important as battles in the American Revolution.”

Article Integration (10–15 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/causes-of-the-revolutionary-war/declaration-of-independence>

Direct teachers to use their **Declaration of Independence article**. The teacher may read aloud, assign independent reading, or use a shared reading approach.

Teacher Focus Questions:

- Which ideas from the article appear in the Declaration?
- How do Patriot arguments connect to the grievances listed?

Interactive Application (15–20 minutes)

Students explore the **Declaration of Independence interactive module and scavenger hunt**. They analyze document content, answer guided questions, and check their understanding.

Day One Closure (5 minutes)

Brief discussion:

- Why did Patriots believe independence was necessary?
- Why might Loyalists have disagreed?

DAY TWO

Day Two Focus

Applying Knowledge Through Narrative & Comprehension

Warm-Up: The \$4 Declaration (10 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/revolutionary-war-writing-activities/the-four-dollar-declaration-of-independence>

Students read the narrative about the authentic copy of the Declaration of Independence discovered behind a picture frame purchased for \$4 at a flea market.

Discussion Prompt:

“How does this story show that history can sometimes be hidden in unexpected places?”

Narrative Writing Activity: “Put Yourself in His Shoes” (20–25 minutes)

Students complete the following creative writing task:

Writing Prompt:

Put yourself in his shoes! Finish the story below with a description of how you (luckily) found a coveted piece of history.

It looked as if the house had been vacant for hundreds of years. There were cobwebs everywhere and the wooden floorboards creaked loudly. In the clouds of dust, I saw what appeared to be an old staircase...

Teacher Guidance:

Students should:

- Describe the discovery of a historical treasure
- Explain why the item is important
- Connect their discovery to what they know about history

Reading Comprehension Activities (20 minutes)

Students complete **Declaration of Independence reading comprehension activities**, focusing on:

- [Declaration of Independence Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1100
- [Declaration of Independence Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1100

Optional Fun Activities

- [Is Recess an Unalienable Right for Kids?](#) (Writing Activity)

Discuss the concept of unalienable rights and their importance to the new nation. Read the instructions for the writing prompt to students and tell them that they will be constructing an informal persuasive essay. Further explain that the key to persuasive essays is not what side they take, but rather the evidence they present in support of that side. This assignment allows students to make up evidence, statistics, or expert quotes. Review with students examples of "evidence" that might support each side. For example, you might make up a statistic such as, "a study by Harvard University concluded that elementary schools in which teachers were disallowed from taking recess time from students scored 20 percent higher on standardized tests than schools that allowed recess to be taken away." Students will love this prompt! Encourage them to take the unpopular side.

- [Declaration of Independence Online Jigsaw](#)
- [Independence Hall Coloring Page](#)
- [John Hancock Challenge](#) (students may have already done this when learning about John Hancock).

In this interactive activity, students design their own signature in the bold spirit of John Hancock using different pen styles, effects, and Revolutionary War stamps. After creating their masterpiece, they can “publish” it by placing their signature directly onto a section of the Declaration of Independence—just like Hancock did. The challenge blends creativity with history, helping students connect personally to the courage and symbolism of signing the Declaration.

[Printable version of this activity](#)

Day Two Closure (5 minutes)

Class discussion:

- Why is the Declaration of Independence still important today?
- How do ideas, documents, and chance discoveries help shape our understanding of history?