



American Values: Freedom and the Declaration of Independence

Purpose: This lesson briefly examines the importance of freedom in American history and American government. Students will look at the content of the Declaration of Independence and create their own definition of freedom based on those words. By creating their own declarations students will be able to conceptualize the idea of freedoms and how that term might be applied in their daily lives.

Objectives:

1. Students will examine events that took place prior to the writing of the Declaration of Independence in order to determine the need for the document.
2. Students will analyze the words found in the Declaration of Independence in order to describe their importance to Americans.
3. Students will create their own declarations in order to describe the values that are important to students as individuals in society.

Key Words:

Declaration of Independence
liberty

freedom
value

independence
virtue

Materials:

1. Teacher resource: *A Committee for Freedom*
2. Overhead: *The Declaration of Independence*
3. Brown Paper Bags or butcher paper
4. Markers or crayons
5. Student handout: *My Declaration*

Supporting Resources:

1. ***Little Hands: Celebrate America***. Hauser, Jill Frankel.
Nashville, TN: Williamson, 2004.
ISBN- 1-1885593-93-7
2. ***The Journey of the One and Only Declaration of Independence***. St. George, Judith and Hillenbrand, Will.
New York, NY: Philomel Books, 2005.
ISBN- 0-399-23738-0
3. **U.S. History.org- website on the Declaration of Independence**
<http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/>
Operated and maintained by the Independence Hall Association

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Any lesson plan or resource found on the YLI website (<http://youthleadership.net/learning-programs/lesson-plans/>) may be used at the discretion of a participating teacher. Once registered- login and navigate to the lesson plans page for a complete list of lesson plans and resources.

Procedure:

1. Display the word *freedom* to students and ask them to give examples of what is meant by this word. Discuss the following questions after reviewing examples.
 - ❖ Is freedom always a good thing?
 - ❖ Why do people value freedom?
 - ❖ Does freedom mean that you can always do what you want? Why or why not?

Now display the word *liberty* and ask students to compare and contrast the two terms. The words have very similar meanings. The idea of the activity is to show students that freedom and liberty go hand-in-hand.

2. Display the picture on the teacher resource *A Committee for Freedom*. Briefly explain the reasons why Americans wanted freedom from England in 1776. Tell students that the colonists wanted their *independence* or freedom from English rule to make their own decisions regarding their daily lives.
3. Display the overhead *The Declaration of Independence* and read the words aloud. Break the students into small groups and have them discuss what might be meant by that small excerpt from the declaration. If students would like to see a complete copy one can be found online by visiting www.ushistory.org/declaration/.
 - ❖ What do you think is mean by 'Rights' in the fourth line? What rights do Americans have?
 - ❖ Does the pursuit of happiness mean that you should always have fun?
 - ❖ What responsibilities do you think come with being free?
4. Working in the same groups, have the students complete the *My Declaration* activity that is adapted from the *Little Hands Celebrate America* resource. Students should use the brown butcher paper or paper bags to draft their resolutions. Students will share their declarations with the class and identify the values that are important in those documents.
5. As an assessment ask the students to complete one or more of the following sentence starters.
 - ❖ The Declaration of Independence is a document that.....
 - ❖ According to the document, freedom is...
 - ❖ The Declaration of Independence is important to Americans because....

Extension Activity:

Using the book *The Journey of the One and Only Declaration of Independence*, have students discuss the importance of preserving the document as referenced in the book.

- ❖ Why would Americans risk so much to protect the document?

A Committee for Freedom

What is going on in this picture?



The Need for Freedom

The colonists felt as though they had no say in their futures because of the actions of King George III. These actions included:

- ❖ Refusing to allow the colonists to raise an army to defend against an attack from the French.
- ❖ Imposing a stamp tax without the consent of the colonists.
- ❖ Enacting a tax on tea that increased the cost of tea, without the say of the colonists.
- ❖ Enacting a tax on sugar without the approval of the colonists.
- ❖ Passing a law requiring the colonists to provide food and lodging for British soldiers.

Why do you think the colonists felt a Declaration of Independence or freedom was necessary? Do you think you would have signed such a declaration if you had been present in 1776? Why or why not?

The Declaration of Independence



Thomas Jefferson, 1776

**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.**

Life- living
Liberty- freedom



My Declaration

Directions: Write a declaration of what is important to you. Draw a picture to explain your idea. Write the date at the top. July 4, 1776, is the date you will see on the Declaration of Independence.

Here are some virtues (the good ways we think and act to make America a wonderful place) you might like to declare:

- ❖ We must take care of the earth.
- ❖ We should help others to be happy.
- ❖ We should take turns.
- ❖ We must be kind and fair.
- ❖ We should have time to play.

Create your draft in the space below and then create your final copy on the brown paper using crayons or markers.

Don't forget your signature at the bottom of your document. On the Declaration of Independence, John Hancock signed his name very large to show that he wasn't afraid of the British.* The way you sign your name is your own style. It's called your signature. Here are some ways to make your signature stand out.

- ❖ Rainbow write by outlining the letters with several colors.
- ❖ Make a fancy decoration beneath or on top of your name.
- ❖ Add tiny decorations at the tops of lines or inside circles of letters.
- ❖ Add a second dotted or dashed line around each letter.
- ❖ Use a different color for each letter.

Practice here:

* <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/signers/hancock.htm>