

Inventing America

Making a Nation: The Untold Story of the Declaration of Independence

Lesson Guide High School

National Social Studies Standards

1A: The student understands the causes of the American Revolution.

- Explain the consequences of the Seven Years War and the overhaul of English imperial policy following the Treaty of Paris in 1763.
- Compare the arguments advanced by defenders and opponents of the new imperial policy on the traditional rights of English people and the legitimacy of asking the colonies to pay a share of the costs of empire.
- Analyze political, ideological, religious, and economic origins of the Revolution.
- Reconstruct the chronology of the critical events leading to the outbreak of armed conflict between the American colonies and England.
- Reconstruct the arguments among patriots and loyalists about independence and draw conclusions about how the decision to declare independence was reached.

1B: The student understands the principles articulated in the Declaration of Independence.

- Explain the major ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence and their intellectual origins.
- Demonstrate the fundamental contradictions between the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the realities of chattel slavery.
- Draw upon the principles in the Declaration of Independence to construct a sound historical argument regarding whether it justified American independence.

The Learner will...

1. Identify Patriot and Loyalist arguments regarding the Revolution
2. Analyze political, ideological, religious, and economic origins of the Revolution
3. Explain the major ideas expressed in the Declaration and their intellectual origins
4. Make an argument whether the Declaration of Independence was justified

Vocabulary:

- Parliament
- Townshend Acts
- Stamp Act
- 7 Years War
- Coercive Acts
- Second Continental Congress
- Loyalist
- Patriot
- House of Burgesses
- Quaker

Materials:

1. Inventing America Episode 1: Making a Nation
2. Guess Who Anticipatory Set Handout
3. Episode 1 Activities Handout

Extension Activities

1. Road to Revolution: Primary Source Timeline

Discussion questions:

1. In what ways did the British government or even American colonists violate democratic ideals in the lead up to the American Revolution?
2. In what ways did religion play a role in the independence movement?
3. The founders were influenced by multiple philosophers. Name one philosopher that inspired them and how his work contributed to the Revolution.
4. The committee that wrote the Declaration of Independence was composed of 5 men. Jefferson stated that Sherman and Livingston were “put on the committee for geographical, not literary reasons.” Why would they select committee members based on their colony and not on their writing abilities? What does this tell you about the colonies prior to the Revolution?
5. How did the Revolution break up families?
6. Describe the relationships among the men and their fellow patriots. Do they seem to get along? Are there any rivalries?
7. What evidence can you find that women had limited rights in colonial America?

Lesson Procedure:

1. **Anticipatory Set:** Distribute the “Guess Who” worksheets to the students. Students should read through the 16 statements and match the statements to the correct

influential Patriot. These four men will be interviewed in Inventing America: Episode 1. Students can compare their guesses with their partner.

2. **Objectives and Vocabulary:** Go over the learning objectives for the day with the students and explain that the students will hear an interview with John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Dickinson.
3. Define the following vocabulary which the students will hear throughout the video:
 - a. Parliament
 - b. Townshend Acts
 - c. Stamp Act
 - d. 7 Years War
 - e. Coercive Acts
 - f. Second Continental Congress
 - g. Loyalist
 - h. Patriot
 - i. House of Burgesses
 - j. Quaker
4. **Viewing the Video:** The teacher can choose to show the video in full or show the video clips. This guide will break the video up into five parts with questions that go with each section.
5. Read the following description of John Adams from the Inventing America character descriptions: JOHN ADAMS (1735-1826). Delegate from Massachusetts. The most outspoken advocate for independence in the Second Continental Congress, he was “obnoxious, suspected and unpopular” by his own admission and was viewed by his colleagues as impetuous, vain, and highly opinionated. Nevertheless, he commanded respect for his integrity and intellect. While deferential to fellow delegates Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, he was openly contemptuous of John Dickinson.
6. Play Video: Part 1- 2:39- 10:40. This section introduces students to John Adams and the revolutionary beginnings.
7. As students view the video they should answer the following questions on their handout:
 - a. According to John Adams, when did the Revolution begin?
 - b. What does John Adams call the Boston Massacre? Why?
 - c. Why was Parliament taxing the colonists in the first place?
 - d. Why did John Adams defend the British soldiers on trial for murder? What was the result of the case?
 - e. Who made an engraving of the Boston Massacre? How did this image portray the event?
 - f. According to John Adams, what was “the last straw” for the colonists? What did they do as a response?

8. After viewing this section of the video, discuss the above questions and check for student understanding.
9. Read the following description of Benjamin Franklin from the Inventing America character descriptions: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1706-1790). Delegate from Pennsylvania. Wise in the ways of courts and empires, he was the most famous man in America. Supported by a cane, his long hair trailing over his shoulders, he personified philosophic tranquility. After spending a decade as the colonies' agent to the Court of St. James [Great Britain], his inclination toward compromise conflicted with his renewed identity as an American. In Congress he served as intermediary (usually without success) between John Adams and John Dickinson.
10. Play video: Part 2- 17:28- 21:34. This section will introduce students to Benjamin Franklin and discuss how he and the British were out of touch with American sentiments.
11. As students view the video they should answer the following questions on their handout:
 - a. Why was Benjamin Franklin frustrated with Pennsylvania's government?
 - b. What was the Stamp Act?
12. After viewing this section of the video, discuss the above questions and check for student understanding.
13. Read the following description of Thomas Jefferson from the Inventing America character descriptions: THOMAS JEFFERSON (1743-1826). Delegate from Virginia. Elected to Congress as a replacement for his mother's cousin, he was an unknown when he arrived in Philadelphia. Soft-spoken and modest, he was neither an effective speaker nor a political heavyweight. Throughout his tenure in Congress, it was his wish to return home and tend to his ailing wife. Yet time and circumstances conspired to secure his place in history as the author of the Declaration of Independence.
14. Play the video part 3: 29:10- 38:27. This section will introduce students to Thomas Jefferson and the Second Continental Congress.
15. As students view the video they should answer the following video questions:
 - a. How did Thomas Jefferson argue that the American colonists did not have to follow the laws of Parliament?
 - b. Can His Majesty thus put down all laws under his feet? Can he erect a power superior to himself? He has done it indeed by force; but let him remember that force cannot give right....Kings are the servants, not the proprietors of the people....Let not the name of George the Third be a blot on the page of history."
What is Jefferson saying in this passage? How was it received by the Virginia delegates? By the English?
 - c. What was the punishment for treason?

- d. Why did Adams nominate Washington over Hancock to command the Continental Army?
16. After viewing this section of the video, discuss the above questions and check for student understanding.
17. Read the following description of John Dickinson from the Inventing America character descriptions: JOHN DICKINSON (1732-1808). Delegate from Pennsylvania. The opposite of John Adams in personality and temperament and his chief rival in Congress, the “farmer from Pennsylvania” sought in the end to mend fences with the Mother Country. Adams called him a “piddling genius.” More charitable colleagues thought of him as well-meaning if wrong-headed. No matter. The unfortunate Mr. Dickinson, by refusing to sign the Declaration of Independence, was to find himself on the wrong side of history.
18. Play the video part 4: 38:40- 42:43. This section will introduce students to John Dickinson and explore why some Americans were opposed to the Revolution.
19. As students view the video they should answer the following questions:
 - a. What did Mr. Dickinson say in his Declaration of the Causes of Taking Up Arms?
 - b. How did this differ from what he wrote in the Olive Branch Petition?
 - c. Why did Mr. Dickinson change his mind about revolution and oppose war?
20. After viewing this section of the video, discuss the above questions and check for student understanding.
21. Play the last portion of the video part 5: 42:43- 1:07:34. This section discusses the influences of the Declaration and details the writing and passing of the document.
22. As students view the video they should answer the following video questions:
 - a. What does Jefferson mean by “natural law”? How is this different from common law?
 - b. What document helped “turn the tide of public in favor of independence?”
 - c. What were some of the different arguments between the radicals and conservatives over the Declaration?
 - d. The following statement was in the original draft of the Declaration: “The Christian king of Great Britain has waged cruel war against human nature in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere.” Why was it taken out?
 - e. When was the vote unanimous in favor of passing the Declaration?
23. After viewing this section of the video, discuss the above questions and check for student understanding.
24. **Reflection and Critical Thinking:** Ask students to reflect on the video and discuss the following questions:
 - a. In what ways did the British government or even American colonists violate democratic ideals in the lead up to the American Revolution?
 - b. In what ways did religion play a role in the independence movement?

- c. The founders were influenced by multiple philosophers. Name one philosopher that inspired them and how his work contributed to the revolution.
 - d. The committee who wrote the Declaration of Independence was composed of 5 men. Jefferson stated that Sherman and Livingston were “put on the committee for geographical, not literary reasons.” Why would they select committee members based on their colony and not on their writing abilities? What does this tell you about the colonies prior to the Revolution?
 - e. How did the Revolution break up families?
 - f. Describe the relationships among the men and their fellow patriots. Do they seem to get along? Are there any rivalries?
 - g. What evidence can you find that women had limited rights in colonial America?
25. Direct students’ attention to activities 2 and 3 on their Inventing America guide. Give students time to work through those 2 activities.
26. Ask students to check over their Guess Who worksheet and make any corrections needed.
27. **Assessment:** At one point in the video, Jefferson said he intended for the Declaration to be “an expression of the American mind.” What do you think he meant by this? Give specific evidence from the Declaration to defend your response.

Extension Activities:

- a. Road to Revolution Primary Source Activity. Distribute the extension activity packet that contains four primary sources mentioned throughout Episode 1: Making a Nation. By analyzing excerpts and portions of the sources, students will have a better understanding of critical documents that led to the outbreak of the American Revolution.
- b. Natural Law in the Declaration of Independence. Distribute the extension activity packet. In this activity, students will read what Jefferson said about John Locke in the video. Then, they will read an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence to identify where Locke’s theory of Natural Law is present. After identifying where in the source it is found, students should explain their reasoning using specific textual evidence.

Works Cited:

Thomas Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, Federal Edition (New York and London, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904-5). Vol. 2. Retrieved 7/8/2019 from the World Wide Web: <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/755>

