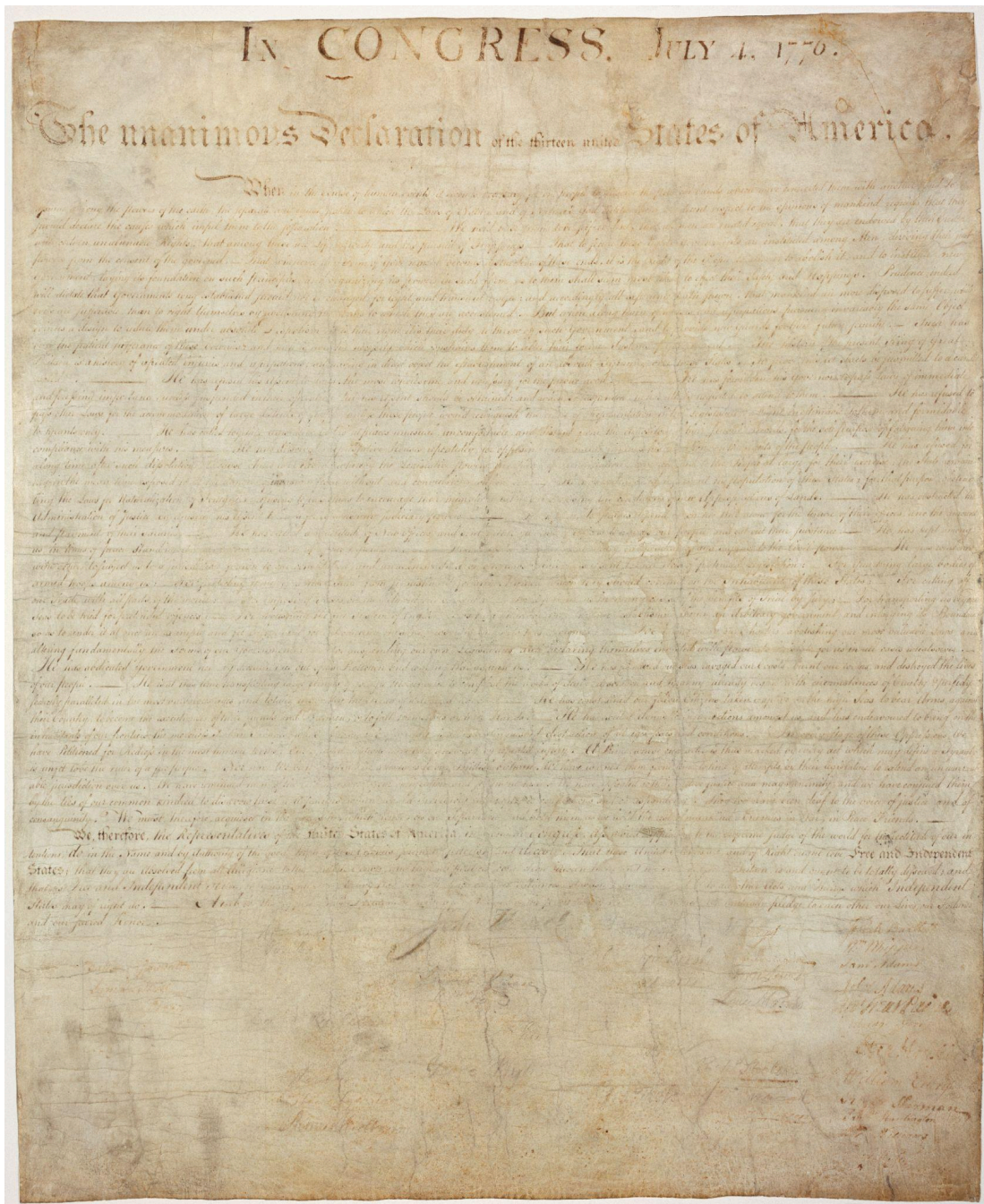


6-8: Decoding the Declaration



NATIONAL
ARCHIVES

How to Use this Guide

Dear Educators,

Thank you for your interest in the Decoding the Declaration virtual program for grades 6-8! This guide outlines the program's guiding questions, standards alignment, and program logistics. It also includes instructions and material for facilitating the program's **required** pre-program activity as well as a recommended post-program activity. We look forward to connecting with your students soon to learn more about the Declaration of Independence!

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National Standards Alignment

National Center for History in the Schools History Content Standards	College, Career, & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards	National Standards for Civics and Government (5-8)
Standard 1B: The student understands the principles articulated in the Declaration of Independence.	D2.Civ.8.6-8. Analyze ideas and principles contained in the founding documents of the United States, and explain how they influence the social and political system.	NSCG-C.5-8.2.C.1: Students should be able to explain the importance of shared political values and principles to American society.

Required Pre-program Activity

Historical Context

Note: The following provides background information for content covered during the Decoding the Declaration virtual program. It is available online at [The Declaration of Independence: What Does it Say? | National Archives](#) and [The Declaration of Independence: How Did it Happen? | National Archives](#)

The Declaration of Independence: What Does it Say?

The Declaration of Independence was designed for multiple audiences: the King, the colonists, and the world. It was also designed to multitask. Its goals were to rally the troops, win foreign allies, and to announce the creation of a new country. The introductory sentence states the Declaration's main purpose, to explain the colonists' right to revolution. In other words, "to declare the causes which impel them to the separation." Congress had to prove the legitimacy of its cause. It had just defied the most powerful nation on Earth. It needed to motivate foreign allies to join the fight.

Preamble

These are the lines contemporary Americans know best: "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." These stirring words were designed to convince Americans to put their lives on the line for the cause. Separation from the mother country threatened their sense of security, economic stability, and identity. The preamble sought to inspire and unite them through the vision of a better life.

List of Grievances

The list of 27 complaints against King George III constitute the proof of the right to rebellion. Congress cast "the causes which impel them to separation" in universal terms for an international audience. Join our fight, reads the subtext, and you join humankind's fight against tyranny.

Resolution of Independence

The most important and dramatic statement comes near the end: "That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States." It declares a complete break with Britain and its King and claims the powers of an independent country.

The Declaration of Independence: How Did it Happen?

The Revolution Begins

In the early 1770s, more and more colonists became convinced that Parliament intended to take away their freedom. In fact, the Americans saw a pattern of increasing oppression and corruption happening all around the world. Parliament was determined to bring its unruly American subjects to heel. Britain began to prepare for war in early 1775. The first fighting broke out in April in Massachusetts. In August, the King declared the colonists “in a state of open and avowed rebellion.” For the first time, many colonists began to seriously consider cutting ties with Britain. The publication of Thomas Paine’s stirring pamphlet *Common Sense* in early 1776 lit a fire under this previously unthinkable idea. The movement for independence was now in full swing.

Choosing Independence

The colonists elected delegates to attend a Continental Congress that eventually became the governing body of the union during the Revolution. Its second meeting convened in Philadelphia in 1775. The delegates to Congress adopted strict rules of secrecy to protect the cause of American liberty and their own lives. In less than a year, most of the delegates abandoned hope of reconciliation with Britain. On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee introduced a resolution “that these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states.” They appointed a Committee of Five to write an announcement explaining the reasons for independence. Thomas Jefferson, who chaired the committee and had established himself as a bold and talented political writer, wrote the first draft.

Writing the Declaration

On June 11, 1776, Jefferson holed up in his Philadelphia boarding house and began to write. He borrowed freely from existing documents like the Virginia Declaration of Rights and incorporated accepted ideals of the Enlightenment. Jefferson later explained that “he was not striving for originality of principal or sentiment.” Instead, he hoped his words served as an “expression of the American mind.” Less than three weeks after he’d begun, he presented his draft to Congress. He was not pleased when Congress “mangled” his composition by cutting and changing much of his carefully chosen wording. He was especially sorry they removed the part blaming King George III for the slave trade, although he knew the time wasn’t right to deal with the issue.

Declaring Independence

On July 2, 1776, Congress voted to declare independence. Two days later, it ratified the text of the Declaration. John Dunlap, official printer to Congress, worked through the night to set the Declaration in type and print approximately 200 copies. These copies,

known as the Dunlap Broad­sides, were sent to various committees, assemblies, and commanders of the Continental troops. The Dunlap Broad­sides weren't signed, but John Hancock's name appears in large type at the bottom. One copy crossed the Atlantic, reaching King George III months later. The official British response scolded the "misguided Americans" and "their extravagant and inadmissible Claim of Indpendency".

Pre-program Activity Instructions

Note: The pre-program activity supports student learning about the Declaration of Independence. This activity must be completed before students participate in the Decoding the Declaration virtual program.

Meet the Declaration of Independence

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Objectives: After completing this activity, students will be able to

- Define the terms “Declaration” and “Independence”
- Analyze the Dunlap Broadside noting purpose, audience, and other elements
- Describe the historical context behind the Declaration of Independence
- Identify why the Declaration of Independence was created

Activity Outline:

1. **Introduction:** Think-Pair-Share

- What does it mean to declare independence?
 - **Think:** Ask students to choose one or two words that they would use to define the words “declaration” and “independence”
 - **Pair:** In small groups, have students share their words and then, as a group, come up with a definition for each term
 - **Share:** Ask for a few groups to share their definitions
 - Declaration: An official or public statement about something
 - Independence: Freedom from being ruled by another group
- Explain to students that they are going to learn more today about the Declaration of Independence and why it was created.

Main Activity: Meet the Declaration of Independence

- Document Analysis: The Dunlap Broadside:
 - This activity can be completed as a whole group, in small groups, or individually
 - Display the Dunlap Broadside, or, if working in small groups, provide students with a copy of the document
 - Then, ask students the following questions about the document:
 - What do you see?
 - Is the document handwritten or typed?
 - Are there any special markings on the document?
 - Tell students that this document is the Dunlap Broadside, the first printed version of the Declaration of Independence
 - Explain to students that they are going to take a closer look at the Dunlap Broadside to learn more about the Declaration of Independence and why it was written.
 - Ask students the following questions and give them time to brainstorm their response to each question. Students can find the answer to each

question by looking at the Dunlap Broadside itself. Consider focusing attention on specific sections of the document to help students find the information they need.

- Who wrote the document?
 - *Continental Congress*
 - *Students may answer Thomas Jefferson – while Jefferson is considered the primary drafter of the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress edited Jefferson’s draft, and Congress had to declare/approve the Declaration. The Declaration of Independence is not the work of one individual but of a collective body representing the thirteen colonies.*
- When was it written?
 - *July 4, 1776*
- Where is it from?
 - *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*
- Provide students with the following background information as needed
 - *Before our country became the United States, there were thirteen original colonies and those colonies were part of Great Britain – a country ruled by King George III. Many people living in the colonies felt that King George III was unfair because they had no representation in their government. There were many struggles between the colonists and the British troops which eventually led to war. During the war, the leading men of the colonies formed a Continental Congress in Philadelphia. The Congress appointed a Committee of Five to draft the Declaration of Independence. The five men included John Adams, Roger Sherman, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston, and Thomas Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson took the lead in writing the Declaration. The Continental Congress edited the language in Jefferson’s draft. Congress voted to separate from Great Britain on July 2, 1776 and adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. The actual signing of the engrossed (handwritten) Declaration took place on August 2, 1776 or later. The Continental Congress hired John Dunlap, a Philadelphia printer, to print the Dunlap Broadside the night of July 4, 1776.*
 - Additional background information on the drafting of the Declaration of Independence is available in the historical context section of the teacher guide
- Why was the Declaration of Independence written?
 - This activity can be completed as a whole group, in small groups, or individually
 - Students will examine excerpts from the Dunlap Broadside (see [page 9](#)) to discover the purpose behind the Declaration of Independence.

Consider walking students through unfamiliar vocabulary as they answer the question:

- Why was the Declaration of Independence written?
 - What words explain why the colonies want to separate from Great Britain?
 - Why do the colonists think they have the right to be independent from Great Britain?
- If working individually or in small groups, consider having the groups look at different excerpts. Students can then share the details that they gathered from their excerpt and compare what they learned.
- Additional discussion questions include:
 - Are there key words or ideas that you see repeated in the Declaration of Independence?
 - Did you learn something new by looking at a different section of the Dunlap Broadside?
- The Declaration of Independence was written to state the reasons for separation from Great Britain and to raise support for an independent United States.

2. **Wrap-Up:** Power to Persuade

- Have students create a new rule for the classroom using the worksheet provided on [page 10](#)
 - In creating this rule, students must provide three reasons or justifications for why their rule should be implemented
- *Optional:* Have students share their new rules and vote as a class on which one should be adopted
- **Program Connection:** Today, you learned more about the history and purpose of the Declaration of Independence. During the Decoding the Declaration virtual program, you will discover some of the big ideas included in the Declaration, including many of the reasons the colonists provided for declaring independence.

Pre-program Activity Documents

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.
A DECLARATION
BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.

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 according to 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 harass 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 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 complete the Works of Death, Desolation, and Tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and 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 Attention to our British 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.

Signed by ORDER and in BEHALF of the CONGRESS,

JOHN HANCOCK, PRESIDENT.

ATTEST,
CHARLES THOMSON, SECRETARY.

PHILADELPHIA: PRINTED BY JOHN DUNLAP.

The Dunlap Broadside

Section from the Dunlap Broadside

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**.

Words to Know

Dissolve: To end or get rid of

Political Bands: Official connection between Great Britain and the American colonies; Allegiance

Impel: To make someone feel like they have to do something

Section from the Dunlap Broadside

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.

Words to Know

Usurpations: Illegally taking power

Tyranny: Unfair use of power; unlimited power

Candid: Fair; Open; Unbiased

The Power to Persuade

Create a new rule for your classroom and write it in the box below:

List three reasons for why this new rule is needed. Why should other people support putting this new rule in place?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How to Prepare Students for the *Decoding the Declaration* Virtual Program

Guiding Questions

- What are some of the big ideas in the Declaration of Independence?
- How has the Declaration of Independence's language continued to inspire Americans throughout history?
- How does the Declaration justify independence?

Program Overview

During this interactive program, students will learn about the Declaration and why it is important. By analyzing National Archives records, students will explore some of the big ideas written in the Declaration of Independence, including the concept that all men are created equal, the reasons for independence, and the risks that the signers of the Declaration took in supporting independence.

Guidance for Virtual Program

Note: The following outlines keys for success for the Decoding the Declaration virtual program.

Before Attending The Decoding the Declaration Virtual Program

1. Please complete the required pre-program activity to prepare students for the program itself
2. Divide the class into small groups (2-3 students per group)
3. Please print or provide students with digital access to the program documents (see [page 13](#)).
 - Each student should receive the [Youth March for Integrated Schools](#) photograph.
 - Each group should receive **one** of the grievances. Depending on the number of students in your class, some groups may receive the same grievance.

During The Decoding the Declaration Virtual Program

1. Please plan to connect to your scheduled program a minimum of **5 minutes** before the scheduled start time. Please note: The NARA Education Team may reschedule student programs for groups that connect more than **15 minutes** late.
2. We require that the requesting educator or another educator from your institution be present during the program to observe the session and support classroom management.
3. Decoding the Declaration is an interactive virtual program. The NARA Educator facilitating the program may request the classroom teacher's help to call on students to share their responses.
4. Students will interact with National Archives documents during this program through whole group and small group activities. Please have students seated for the program in their small groups (2-3 students per group).

Program Documents - pg. 13-19

Note: Please ensure that students have access to the following documents during the Decoding the Declaration virtual program. Please see the “Before Attending” section above for more specific instructions.



Justifying Independence: Grievance #11

HE has kept among us, in Times of Peace, Standing
Armies without the consent of our Legislatures

Words to Know

Standing Army: British soldiers

Consent: Approval

Legislature: Part of the government that makes laws

1. What words or phrases stand out to you?

2. List examples of “loaded language”

3. Rewrite this grievance in your own words:

Justifying Independence: Grievance #14

FOR quartering large Bodies of Armed Troops among
us

Words to Know

Quartering: The American colonies had to provide British troops with food, supplies, and housing

1. What words or phrases stand out to you?

2. List examples of “loaded language”

3. Rewrite this grievance in your own words:

Justifying Independence: Grievance #16

FOR cutting off our Trade with all Parts of the World

Words to Know

Trade: Buying and selling goods; Great Britain controlled who the American colonies could and could not trade with

1. What words or phrases stand out to you?

2. List examples of “loaded language”

3. Rewrite this grievance in your own words:

Justifying Independence: Grievance #17

FOR imposing Taxes on us without our Consent

Words to Know

Imposing: Forcing

Consent: Approval

1. What words or phrases stand out to you?

2. List examples of “loaded language”

3. Rewrite this grievance in your own words:

Justifying Independence: Grievance #18

FOR depriving us in many Cases, of the Benefits of
Trial by Jury

Words to Know

Depriving: Taking away

Jury: “A group of people who have been chosen to listen to all the facts in a trial and to decide if a person is guilty or not guilty.” People serving on a jury often come from the community where the case is being heard.

1. What words or phrases stand out to you?

2. List examples of “loaded language”

3. Rewrite this grievance in your own words:

Justifying Independence: Grievance #24

HE has plundered our Seas, ravaged our Coasts,
burnt our Towns, and destroyed the Lives of our
People

Words to Know

Plundered: Rob; Take something by force

Ravaged: Destroy

1. What words or phrases stand out to you?

2. List examples of “loaded language”

3. Rewrite this grievance in your own words:

Post-Program Activity

To Declare Independence...Or Not

Estimated Time: Two Class Periods (time devoted to each part of the activity can be adjusted for individual classroom schedules)

Objectives: Through completing this activity, students will

- Review content learned during the Decoding the Declaration virtual program
- Evaluate the historical accuracy and persuasiveness of the grievances listed in the Declaration of Independence
- Decide whether the American colonies should declare independence from Great Britain

Activity Outline:

1. **Introduction:**

- Use the following questions to review material from the Decoding the Declaration virtual program
- **Ask Students:**
 - Why was the Declaration of Independence written?
 - What are some of the reasons the colonists cited to justify independence from Great Britain?

2. **Part One:** Researching the Grievances

- Assign individual students specific grievances from the Declaration of Independence to research
 - At least two students should be assigned to each grievance
 - Students can use the To Declare Independence...or Not worksheet to organize their research (see [page 22](#)).
 - You may choose to limit students to the grievances discussed in the Decoding the Declaration virtual program or expand the list to include different grievances.
- Once students have researched their grievances, organize them into large groups to share their information
 - Each grievance should be represented in each new group
 - Students should share the information they learned about the grievance and whether they find the justification persuasive
- **Part Two:** Declaring Independence...or Not
 - As a large group, students will take on the role of the Second Continental Congress and decide whether to declare independence from Great Britain
 - Potential Discussion Questions to Facilitate Debate:
 - What reasons did the American colonists include in the Declaration of Independence to justify breaking away from Great Britain?

- Were these claims exaggerated? How did supporters of King George III respond?
- What rights were being threatened by King George III's and Parliament's actions?
- Do you find the grievances convincing? Why or why not?
- What are potential pros and cons of declaring independence from Great Britain?
- Establish rules of discussion in advance of the debate to ensure widespread student participation and respectful student behavior

3. **Wrap-Up:** Sign the Declaration!

- Share a [photograph](#) of the signatures on the Declaration. This print is from the Stone Copperplate Engraving of the Declaration, which is also held by the National Archives.
 - **Ask Students:** Why do people sign documents? What does it mean to put your name on something?
- **Ask Students:** Would you sign the Declaration of Independence?
 - Invite students to sign the Declaration of Independence

To Declare Independence ... Or Not?

Grievance #_____

Step One: Gathering Evidence

What is this grievance talking about? What are the colonists accusing King George III or Parliament of doing?

What right did the colonists believe was being threatened? How did supporters of King George III respond to this grievance?

List of Sources

Step Two: Weighing the Evidence

Is the grievance historically accurate, or is it exaggerated?

Step Three: What do you Think?

Do you think this grievance is persuasive? Why or Why Not?

Additional Educational Resources

Note: The following educational activities and resources are designed to support student learning. These activities are not required. Feel free to facilitate only the activities that you think would be most helpful for your students.

Resources on the Declaration of Independence from the National Archives

- [The Declaration of Independence | National Archives](#)
- [Declaration of Independence: A Transcription | National Archives](#)
- [Declaration of Independence \(1776\) | National Archives](#)
- [The Declaration of Independence and the Hand of Time | National Archives](#)
- [Declaration of Independence | National Archives Museum](#)
- [Dunlap Broadside \(First Printing of the Declaration of Independence\) | National Archives](#)
- [Teaching the Declaration of Independence \(DocsTeach\)](#)

DocsTeach Educational Activities

- [Prequel to Independence - DocsTeach](#)
- [To Sign or Not to Sign - DocsTeach](#)
- [Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence - DocsTeach](#)