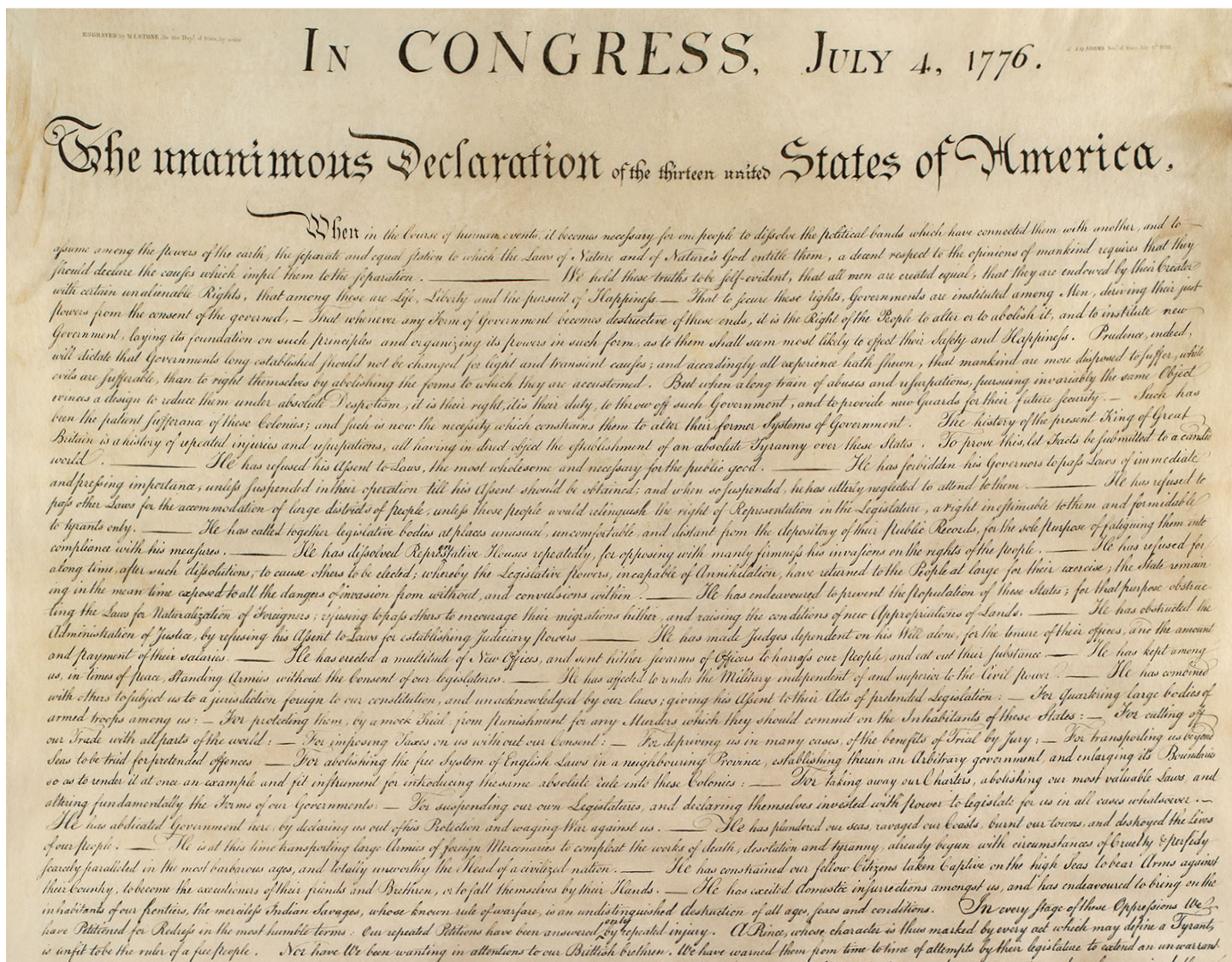


The Declaration of Independence, 1776



The William Stone facsimile of the Declaration of Independence, printed in 1823. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00154.02)

The Declaration of Independence, 1776

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

Tim Bailey taught middle school and elementary school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute's director of curriculum development and instructional design.

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GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: The unit is structured for five 45-minute class periods, but lessons can be combined or assigned as homework.

UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. These skills will enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate documents and other resources of historical significance.

Over the course of five lessons the students will be asked to “read like a detective” to discover the meaning and significance of what is explicitly stated in the Declaration of Independence (primarily written by Thomas Jefferson) and draw logical inferences and conclusions from its text. They will demonstrate these skills by writing succinct summaries of selections from the text, restating these summaries in their own words, and ultimately writing a short persuasive essay in response to a thought-provoking prompt based on the document.

Students will be able to

- Summarize selected passages from a primary source document (e.g., the Declaration of Independence)
- Evaluate and then develop inferences based on information from a primary source document (e.g., the reasons that justified American independence from British colonial rule)
- Analyze and assess the extent to which the Declaration of Independence should be viewed as a declaration of war by the American colonies against Great Britain

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What did the Declaration of Independence suggest are the benefits of having a government?
- According to the Declaration, why was British governance of the colonies a failure?
- How did the Declaration's authors define "independence"?

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social studies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5: Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.1.a: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content; Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), and create an organization that logically sequences the claim(s), reasons, and evidence.

MATERIALS

- Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence, 1776, a transcript from *America's Founding Documents*, National Archives, [archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript)
- Summary Organizers 1–4
- Creating an Essay: The Declaration of Independence

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

AN OVERVIEW OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Independence National Historical Park, National Park Service

Looking back on the Declaration of Independence almost fifty years later, Thomas Jefferson explained that the document's purpose was never meant to be thoroughly original; its purpose wasn't to articulate anything that hadn't been said before, but to make the case for the American colonies in plain terms and persuade the world to see common sense. "It was intended to be an expression of the American mind," Jefferson explains. He goes on to claim that "[the Declaration's] authority rests then on the harmonizing sentiments of the day." (Jefferson to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825)

Jefferson finished his timeless defense of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" in little more than two weeks, and like most writers, he was no stranger to the revision process. Between the Committee of Five and the Second Continental Congress, there were eighty-six edits to the document. The Second Continental Congress removed whole sections. Jefferson was most angered by the removal of one particular clause, a clause blaming the King for forcing the slave trade upon the American colonies.

The final draft of the Declaration of Independence contains a preamble, a list of grievances, a formal declaration of independence, and signatures.

Preamble

This first part of the Declaration contains an assertion of individual rights. Perhaps the most famous line states, "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." This part goes on to say that if the government tries to take these rights away, the people have the right to form a new government. Jefferson also addresses a counterclaim in this section, acknowledging that "Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes." He counters by reminding his audience of the "long train of abuses and usurpations" that makes it "their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security."

Grievances

The longest part of the Declaration begins with "He has refused his Assent to Laws" and goes on to list the unfair actions of the British king and Parliament. In their complaints, the colonists make it clear that they are angry with the British king and government for taking away their rights as English citizens. They point out that the king has ignored or changed their colonial governments, as well as their rights to a trial by jury. The colonists accuse the king of sending a hired army to force them to obey unjust laws. They say the king is "unfit to be the ruler of a free people."

Note: The norms and structure of argumentative writing in the eighteenth century were different than they are in the twenty-first century. The list of grievances that serves as the Declaration's evidence seems largely anecdotal by today's standards. However, the Declaration's claim and underlying assumption (big idea) are especially applicable to the writing standards of twenty-first-century classrooms.

Formal declaration of independence

The final paragraph, beginning with "We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America," affirms that the thirteen colonies are free and independent states. It breaks all ties with the British government and people. As independent states, they can make trade agreements and treaties, wage war, and do whatever is necessary to govern themselves. This formal declaration of independence ends with important words. The words tell us what the signers of the Declaration of Independence were willing to give up for freedom: "we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

Signatures

There are fifty-six signatures on the Declaration of Independence. Fifty men from thirteen states signed the document on August 2 in 1776. The other six signed over the course of the next year and a half. As the president of the Second Continental Congress, John Hancock signed first. He wrote his name very large. Some of the men abbreviated their first names, like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. All of the signers risked their lives when they signed the Declaration of Independence.

Legacy of the argument

Contrary to popular belief, the words of the Declaration of Independence did not gain immediate prominence. In fact, they remained obscure for decades. And yet the spirit of the Declaration caused ripples almost immediately, most famously with the French Revolution in 1789. The Haitian Revolution followed soon after, and the subsequent decades would see many Latin American countries continuing the fight for independence from colonial powers. In 1945, Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh also invoked the document when declaring Vietnamese independence from the French colonial empire.

Within the US, the women's suffrage movement adapted the Declaration of Independence for their cause, asserting in the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments that "all men and women are created equal." Meanwhile, the country's celebrations of independence haunted enslaved people and abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, whose 1852 *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* Speech pondered the nation's shortcomings despite its dedication to values like liberty. As Douglass said, "This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. You may rejoice, I must mourn."

As World War I came to a close, leaders from Eastern Europe gathered inside Independence Hall on October 26, 1918, to sign the Declaration of Common Aims of the Independent Mid-European Nations. Those gathering in Independence Hall that day sought to bring autonomy to the nations of the former Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. The signers pledged their mutual support and their belief that "it is the unalienable right of every people to organize their own governments on such principles and in such forms as they believe will best promote their welfare, safety, and happiness."

After the signing ceremony, Doctor Thomas Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia, read the Declaration of Common Aims on Independence Square, just as John Nixon read the Declaration of Independence on July 8, 1776.

This historical background is from the Independence National Historical Park website, nps.gov/inde/learn/education/classrooms/resources-declarationoverview.htm.

LESSON 1

LESSON 1

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” to gain a clear understanding of the document that served to announce the creation of a new nation. You may choose to share some of the information in the Historical Background at any point in this unit, but the goal is to have the students develop their ideas based solely on the original text. Through reading and analyzing the original text, the students will learn what is explicitly stated, draw logical inferences, and demonstrate their knowledge by writing a succinct summary of excerpts from the text. The first lesson will be completed as a whole-class exercise.

Tim Bailey taught middle school and elementary school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s director of curriculum development and instructional design.

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period (may be combined with Lesson 2)

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of the Declaration of Independence.

MATERIALS

- Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence, 1776, a transcript from *America’s Founding Documents*, National Archives, [archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript)
- Summary Organizer 1

PROCEDURE

1. You may choose to share the excerpts from the Declaration of Independence with the class. These are the excerpts that are included on the four Summary Organizers. Depending on their experience, you may ask them to read the text silently to themselves, read it aloud, or “share read” it with the class. This is done by having the students follow along silently while you begin reading aloud. After a few sentences, ask the class to join in with the reading while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
2. Distribute Summary Organizer 1, the first passage from the Declaration of Independence, and display the organizer in a format large enough for everyone to see (an overhead projector, Elmo projector, or similar device).
3. Explain that the students will be analyzing the first part of the document today and that they will be learning how to do in-depth analysis for themselves. The whole class will go through the process together in the first lesson. Resist the temptation to provide too much context for the Declaration of Independence as the goal is for the students to develop ideas and draw conclusions based solely on what Jefferson put on paper and the Continental Congress approved.

4. Read the excerpt aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation, while the students follow along silently.
5. Then “share read” the text with the students as described above.
6. Explain that the first step is to select keywords from the text.
7. Guidelines for selecting keywords: Keywords are important to understanding the text. These words are usually nouns or verbs. Don’t pick “connector” words (*are, is, the, and, so, etc.*). The number of keywords depends on the length of the text. This selection is 181 words long, so the class can pick up to ten keywords. Since the students must know the meaning of the words they choose, you will have opportunities to teach them how to use context clues, word analysis, and dictionary skills to discover word meanings. They can write down any words they cannot figure out on the back of their organizer for discussion at the end of the class.
8. Students will now underline up to ten words that they believe are keywords.
9. Survey the class to find out what the most popular choices are. You can write them down and have the class discuss the options and vote on the final choice, based on guidance from you. The keywords for this text might include *necessary, dissolve, political bonds* (you can allow a very short phrase if it makes sense as a unit), *declare, separation, self-evident, created equal, liberty, abolish, and government*. Now, no matter which words the students had previously selected, have them write the agreed-upon words in the Keywords section of Summary Organizer 1.
10. Explain to the class that they will use the keywords to build a sentence that summarizes what Thomas Jefferson was saying in this first excerpt. This should be a whole-class discussion and negotiation process. With your guidance the class might summarize the text as “It is necessary for us to dissolve our political bonds and declare a separation; it is self-evident that we are created equal and should have liberty, so we need to abolish our current government.” You might find that the class decides they don’t need some of the words to make the sentence more streamlined. The students should copy the final negotiated sentence into the Keyword Summary section of the organizer.
11. Explain that the students will now restate the summary sentence in their own words, not having to use Jefferson’s words. Again, this is a class discussion and negotiation process. They might restate the summary as “We need to get rid of our old government so we can be free.” The students should copy the final negotiated sentence into the In Your Own Words section of the organizer.
12. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. You could have students use the back of their organizer or a separate vocabulary form to make a note of these words and their meaning.

LESSON 2

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BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, the students will explore the second selection from the Declaration of Independence. Through reading and understanding the Declaration, the students will know what is explicitly stated, draw logical inferences, and demonstrate these skills by writing a succinct summary of the text and then restating that summary in their own words. For this selection, the students will work with partners and in small groups to analyze and summarize Jefferson's words.

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GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period (may be combined with Lesson 1)

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of the Declaration of Independence.

MATERIALS

- Summary Organizer 2

PROCEDURE

1. Review the activities from the previous lesson and discuss the class's summary of the first selection from the Declaration of Independence.
2. Distribute Summary Organizer 2, which provides the second selection from the Declaration of Independence, and display it in a format large enough for the whole class to see.
3. Read the text aloud while the class follows along silently.
4. Share read the text with the class as described in Lesson 1.
5. Review the procedure from Lesson 1, reminding students that they will select keywords from the text, use the keywords to summarize the text, and then restate the summary in their own words. They will be going through the process with partners and in small groups in this lesson.
6. Pair the students up and have them negotiate which words to select as keywords. Because this text selection is shorter than the last one (148 words), they can pick only seven or eight words. After they have chosen their words, both students will write them in the Keywords section of the organizer.
7. Now put two pairs together. Be strategic in how you make your groups to ensure the most participation by all group members. These two pairs will go through the same negotiation to come up with a final list of seven or eight keywords. After they have chosen their words, all the students will write them in the Keywords section of their organizer.

8. Each group will use the keywords its members chose to summarize the meaning of the second selection from the Declaration of Independence. The group members must negotiate with each other to reach a consensus. Try to make sure that everyone is contributing to the process. It is very easy for one student to take control and for the other students to let them. All of the students should write the negotiated sentence into their organizer.
9. Ask the groups to share out their summary sentence. This should start a teacher-led discussion that points out the qualities of the various interpretations of the text. How successful were the groups at getting at Jefferson's main idea, and did they use Jefferson's keywords in summarizing the text?
10. All of the groups will now restate the summary sentence in their own words. Again, this is a negotiation process. After they have decided on a sentence, the students should write the final version into their organizers.
11. Have students share out their sentences. Discuss the clarity and quality of the groups' interpretations of the text selection.
12. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. They can record these words and their meaning on the back of the organizer or on a separate vocabulary form.

LESSON 3

LESSON 3

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, the students will explore the third selection from the Declaration of Independence. Through reading and understanding the Declaration, the students will know what is explicitly stated, draw logical inferences, and demonstrate these skills by writing a succinct summary of the text and then restating that summary in their own words. For this selection, they will be working independently unless you believe they need another day of support from a partner or small group.

MATERIALS

- Summary Organizer 3

PROCEDURE

1. Review the activities from the previous two lessons and discuss the summaries of the first and second selections from the Declaration of Independence.
2. Distribute Summary Organizer 3 with the third selection from the Declaration of Independence and display a copy in a format large enough for the whole class to see.
3. Read the text aloud while the class follows along silently.
4. Share read the text with the class as described in Lesson 1.
5. Review the procedure from Lesson 1, reminding students that they will select keywords from the text, use the keywords to summarize the text, and then restate the summary in their own words. They will be going through the process independently in this lesson.
6. This text is 210 words in length, so the students can pick up to ten keywords.
7. Have students share out their restated summaries. Discuss the clarity and quality of the different interpretations of the text.
8. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. They can record these words and their meaning on the back of the organizer or a separate vocabulary form.

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GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period (may be combined with Lesson 4)

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of the Declaration of Independence.

LESSON 4

LESSON 4

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, the students will explore the fourth selection from the Declaration of Independence. Through reading and understanding the Declaration, the students will know what is explicitly stated, draw logical inferences, and demonstrate these skills by writing a succinct summary of the text and then restating that summary in their own words. For this selection, the students will work independently.

MATERIALS

- Summary Organizer 4

PROCEDURE

1. Review the activities from the previous three lessons and discuss the summaries of the first, second, and third selections from the Declaration of Independence.
2. Distribute Summary Organizer 4 with the fourth selection from the Declaration of Independence, and display a copy in a format large enough for the whole class to see.
3. Read the text aloud while the class follows along silently.
4. Share read the text with the class as described in Lesson 1.
5. Review the procedure from Lesson 1, reminding students that they will select keywords from the text, use the keywords to summarize the text, and then restate the summary in their own words. They will work independently on this text.
6. This selection is 220 words, so the students can pick up to ten keywords. Because this is the longest text selection, it may be challenging for them to select only ten words. However, the purpose of this exercise is for the students to figure out what words are most important to the meaning of the text.
7. Have students share out their restated summaries. Discuss the clarity and quality of the different interpretations of the text.
8. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. They can record these words and their meaning on the back of the organizer or a separate vocabulary form.

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GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period (may be combined with Lesson 3)

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of the Declaration of Independence.

LESSON 5

LESSON 5

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

OVERVIEW

This lesson has two objectives. First, the students will synthesize the work of the last four lessons and demonstrate that they have a clear understanding of the Declaration of Independence. Second, they will write short persuasive essay responses to a choice of thought-provoking prompts about the text and the meaning of the Declaration of Independence. They will have to support their conclusions and analyses with textual evidence from the document.

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GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period (may be combined with Lesson 3)

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of the Declaration of Independence.

MATERIALS

- Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence
- Completed Summary Organizers 1–4
- Creating an Essay: The Declaration of Independence

PROCEDURE

1. Distribute copies of the excerpts from the Declaration of Independence and ask the students to read the text silently to themselves.
2. Make sure the students have Summary Organizers 1–4 from the previous lessons.
3. Lead a discussion in which the students provide a summary sentence for each of the four excerpts, so they have a summary of the entire Declaration of Independence.
4. Each student will write a short persuasive, or argumentative, essay addressing one of the prompts below. You may have them use the Creating an Essay activity sheet to help them organize their writing and identify the evidence. Remind the students that any arguments they make must be backed up with evidence taken directly from the Declaration of Independence. The first prompt is designed to be the easiest.

Prompts

1. What key arguments in the Declaration of Independence support the colonists' decision to separate from Great Britain?
2. Using evidence from the text, make an argument supporting or refuting this statement: The Declaration of Independence can be considered a declaration of war.
3. In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson defined what the role of government should and should not be. How did he make these arguments?

Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence, 1776

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 accordingly 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 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 abdicated Government here, by 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 compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation. . . .

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 attentions to our Brittish brethren. . . . 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. . . .

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.

Transcript from America's Founding Documents, National Archives, [archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript).

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Summary Organizer 1: The Declaration of Independence

Original Text

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. . . .

Transcript from America's Founding Documents, National Archives, [archives.gov/founding-docs](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs).

Keywords

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Summary Organizer 2: The Declaration of Independence

Original Text

. . . Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly 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. . . .

Transcript from America's Founding Documents, National Archives, [archives.gov/founding-docs](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs).

Keywords

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Summary Organizer 3: The Declaration of Independence

Original Text

. . . 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 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 abdicated Government here, by 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 compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation. . . .

Transcript from America's Founding Documents, National Archives, archives.gov/founding-docs.

Keywords

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Summary Organizer 4: The Declaration of Independence

Original Text

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 attentions to our Brittish brethren. . . . 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. . . . 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.

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Creating an Essay: The Declaration of Independence

Choose one of the following questions as an essay prompt. Support your arguments with evidence from the text.

- What key arguments in the Declaration of Independence support the colonists' decision to separate from Great Britain?
- Make an argument supporting or refuting this statement: The Declaration of Independence can be considered a declaration of war.
- In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson defined what the role of government should and should not be. How did he make these arguments?

Topic Sentence or Paragraph

Evidence

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Evidence

Evidence

Concluding Sentence or Paragraph