

Lesson 5: The Guiding Star of Equality: The Declaration of Independence in American History

Graphic Organizer: The Declaration of Independence and Equality in U.S. History

Guiding Questions

- Why have Americans consistently appealed to the Declaration of Independence throughout U.S. history?
 - How have the ideals in the Declaration of Independence impacted the struggle for equality throughout U.S. history?
- I can interpret primary sources related to Founding principles and Civic Virtues.
 - I can create an argument using evidence from primary sources.
 - I can explain how Americans have appealed to the Founding principle of equality throughout U.S. history.



Library of Congress

An official copy of the Declaration of Independence

Part 1: Revisiting the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence, 1776

Introduction

In July 1776, the Continental Congress voted to declare independence from Great Britain. Many consider the Declaration of Independence to be the philosophical foundation of American freedom, equality, and self-government, and in the second part of this activity, you will see how the ideas in this document

have influenced many other events in U.S. history. The Declaration contains three sections: a general statement of natural rights theory and the purpose of government in the Preamble, a list of grievances against the British king, and a declaration of independence from Great Britain.

Essential Vocabulary

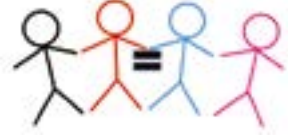
| | |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| self-evident | obvious |
| endowed | given |
| unalienable | impossible to take away |

Source

“We hold these truths to be **self-evident** [clear without needing proof], that all men are created equal, that they are **endowed** [given] by their Creator with certain **unalienable** [impossible to take away] Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are **instituted** [created] among Men, **deriving** [receiving] their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

1. How does the Declaration state that all humans are equal?
2. Where do unalienable rights come from?
3. What is the purpose of government?
4. From where does government get its power?

Part 2: The Declaration of Independence and Equality in U.S. History

| Document Title and Date | Historical Context | Influence of the Declaration of Independence | Image or Memory Aid |
|--|---|--|---|
| Preamble to the Declaration of Independence, 1776 | American colonists broke with Great Britain because it did not respect the colonists' natural rights. | |  |
| Document 1: Petition to the Massachusetts Legislature, 1777 | | | |
| Document 2: Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, 1848 | | | |
| Document 3: Gettysburg Address, 1863 | | | |
| Document 4: The Atlantic Charter, 1941 | | | |
| Document 5: "I Have a Dream" speech, 1963 | | | |

Concluding Analysis

1. Based on the documents you have examined, how has the Declaration of Independence inspired Americans throughout history to help the country live up to its Founding principles?
2. Where do you see debates over freedom and equality continuing today? How might the ideas outlined in the Declaration of Independence influence these debates?