

Delaware Recommended Curriculum

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| Close Reading Lesson Title: | <u>The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence</u> ¹ |
| Author: | Michael Feldman Smyrna School District |
| Content Area: | Social Studies |
| Grade Level: | 8 |

Goal for the Lesson

Students will examine the preamble of the Declaration of Independence to understand the reasoning and principles used to justify declaring independence from Great Britain as well as the fundamental principles that form the foundation of America's political ideology.

Content Standards

Civics Standard Two 6-8b: Students will understand the principles and content of major American state papers such as the Declaration of Independence; United States Constitution (including the Bill of Rights); and the Federalist Papers.

Essential Question

- How are the principles of major American state papers guaranteeing liberty to contemporary Americans?

Connection to the CCSS

- *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1* Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2* Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4* Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.5* Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).
- *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6* Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

Text Selection Background

The Declaration did more than merely announce to the world the unanimous decision of the thirteen American colonies to separate from Great Britain. Primarily authored by Thomas Jefferson, it articulates the fundamental principles that form the foundation of America's political ideology. As the first formal statement by a nation's people asserting their right to choose their own government, the Declaration of Independence became a significant landmark in the history of democracy. The portion selected for this Close Reading activity, the Preamble, summarizes the fundamental principles of American self-government.

¹ Excerpt of the *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson, et al. Lexile: 1570

Depending on when this lesson fits into the scope and sequence of the course of study, students may require a lesson(s) on political principles prior to this close read to give them the ability to use the appropriate terms in their analysis of the Declaration and the culminating essay. Those principles may include natural rights philosophy vs. divine right of kings, unalienable rights, consent of the governed, liberty, freedom, equality, right to revolution, legitimate government, etc.

Students should have some background knowledge of the American colonial relationship with Great Britain prior to beginning this lesson.

Notes for Teachers

This lesson should take two class periods to complete the close reading, text-dependent questions, and the essay.

The Teaching Channel provides a [video](#) of a Declaration Close Reading lesson with an interesting hook to inspire student interest.

Instructional Strategies

Strategy One: Gathering Information Activating Prior Knowledge

Present students with the definition below and ask them to identify 3 principles that affect their behavior. Have students Think-Pair-Share before holding a class conversation about the meaning of principle.

Principle: (*noun*) a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.

Identify 3 *principles* you believe in and explain how they affect your behavior. Support your answer with an example.

Strategy Two: Gathering Information Close Reading

Provide students with the text of the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence ([Handout 1](#)). Then, follow these steps:

- First, the teacher will read the text aloud.
- Then, the teacher will read the text aloud again and stop to discuss some of the key vocabulary.
- On the second reading, students should make notes on the vocabulary in the margin, and write any thoughts that they feel may be important. Emphasize that students are not expected to know all the words or understand everything in the text right away. The text will be read closely several times to uncover what it means.

In Congress, July 4, 1776

The **Unanimous** Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America

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**. — 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.

Self-evident: clearly true and requiring no proof or explanation

Derive: obtain something from a specified source

Transient: lasting only for a short time; impermanent.

Usurpation: A wrongful seizure or exercise of authority or privilege belonging to another; an encroachment

Despotism: the exercise of absolute power, esp. in a cruel and oppressive way.

¹ Underline = words which cannot be discovered in context by students. **Boldface** words are tier 2 that can be determined in context.

**Strategy Three: Extending and Refining
Text-Dependent Questions**

Use the following method to address each of the questions below on [Handout 2](#).

- **Re-read** the section of the text in the left column.
- **Take notes** to help you respond to the questions.
- **Discuss** the questions in groups of 2 – 3.
- **Write** what you think is the *best* answer to each question.

| Text under Discussion | Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions for Students |
|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">In Congress, July 4, 1776</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America</p> <p>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.</p> | <p><u>Ask Students:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What can you infer about this reading from the opening “the Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America?” What kind of text is this? What do you expect this text will be about? <p><u>Ask Students:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. What is the tone of this text in this passage? Which words in the text lead you to that conclusion? 3. What has “become necessary”? What does this phrase imply about the actions taken by colonist prior to the declaration? 4. What does labeling the Americans “one people” and the British “another” say about their union? 5. How does the author’s choice of the words “dissolve” and “separation” illustrate his point of view regarding the nature of this disunion? 6. What “entitled” Americans to claim this separation? How does this justification affect their case for independence? |

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**. — 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.

Ask Students:

7. What "self-evident" truths does the author identify?
8. How does the author's choice of the phrases "self-evident" truths and "unalienable rights" affect his argument?
9. Why are "governments instituted among men?"
10. What does "deriving their powers from the *consent of the governed*" mean?
11. Under what circumstances do the people have the right to "alter or abolish" their government?
12. According to the author, how should any new government be created?
13. Explain the key point in the author's argument in *this portion* of the text.

Ask Students:

14. Explain the author's reasoning for declaring independence at this point in time.
15. Which words in this portion of the text illustrate the author's point of view on declaring independence from Great Britain?
16. How does the author's choice of words affect the argument for declaring independence?
17. Summarize the message the author is sharing with the "candid world." Cite examples from the entire preamble.

Strategy Four: Application

Informative/Explanatory Writing

Students should have completed the previous strategies. The teacher should have held a class discussion to ensure students comprehend the text and the principles found in it.

Then have students write an essay that explains the ideas and principles American colonists used to justify their independence from Great Britain. Students should support the explanations with specific evidence from the text. Have students complete the [Pre-writing Graphic Organizer \(Handout 3\)](#) prior to writing the essay.

Connection to Common Core Writing Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2a Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories as appropriate to achieving purpose; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2b Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2c Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2d Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2e Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2f Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

Expectations for student writing

Teachers should see evidence that students understand the political ideas and principles articulated in the preamble of the Declaration of Independence. Those principles include, but are not limited to:

- - Natural rights
 - Equality
 - Unalienable rights
 - Freedom and liberty
 - Pursuit of happiness
 - Legitimate government
 - Consent of the governed
 - Right of revolution

Students should cite specific portions of the text and be able to paraphrase or explain that text in their own words to support their explanation.

Extension Activities

- (a) Compare the preamble of the Declaration of Independence to contemporary political speeches to analyze the endurance of the principles advocated by the founders.
- (b) Draw connections between the Declaration of Independence and other major American state papers including the Federalist Papers, United States Constitution (including the Bill of Rights); the Gettysburg Address, etc.
- (c) Compare the Declaration of Independence to similar documents used in other countries to justify revolution.

The Declaration of Independence: A Close Reading

In Congress, July 4, 1776

The **Unanimous** Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America

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.

Notes:

self-evident: clearly true and requiring no proof or explanation

derive: obtain something from a specified source

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.

transient: lasting only for a short time; impermanent.

usurpation: A wrongful seizure or exercise of authority or privilege belonging to another; an encroachment

absolute Despotism: the exercise of absolute power, esp. in a cruel and oppressive way.

The Declaration of Independence: A Close Reading

Text-Dependent Questions

Use the following method to address each of the questions below.

- **Re-read** the section of the text in the left column.
- **Take notes** to help you respond to the questions.
- **Discuss** the questions in groups of 2 – 3.
- **Write** what you think is the *best* answer to each question.

| Text Under Discussion | Guiding Questions for Students |
|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">In Congress, July 4, 1776</p> <p>The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America</p> | <p>18. What can you infer about this reading from the opening “the Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America?” What kind of text is this? What do you expect this text will be about?</p> |
| <p>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.</p> | <p>19. What is the tone of this text in this passage? Which words in the text lead you to that conclusion?</p> <p>20. What has “become necessary”? What does this phrase imply about the actions taken by colonist prior to the declaration?</p> <p>21. What does labeling the Americans “one people” and the British “another” say about their union?</p> <p>22. How does the author’s choice of the words “dissolve” and “separation” illustrate his point of view regarding the nature of this disunion?</p> <p>23. What “entitled” Americans to claim this separation? How does this justification affect their case for independence?</p> |

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| <p>We hold these truths to be <u>self-evident</u>, 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, <u>deriving</u> 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.</p> | <p>24. What "self-evident" truths does the author identify?</p> <p>25. How does the author's choice of the phrases "self-evident" truths and "unalienable rights" affect his argument?</p> <p>26. Why are "governments instituted among men?"</p> <p>27. What does "deriving their powers from the <i>consent of the governed</i>" mean?</p> <p>28. Under what circumstances do the people have the right to "alter or abolish" their government?</p> <p>29. According to the author, how should any new government be created?</p> <p>30. Explain the key point in author's argument in <i>this portion</i> of the text.</p> |

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**. — 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.

31. Explain the author's reasoning for declaring independence at this point in time.
32. Which words in this portion of the text illustrate the author's point of view on declaring independence from Great Britain?
33. How does the author's choice of words affect the argument for declaring independence?
34. Summarize the message the author is sharing with the "candid world?" Cite examples from the entire preamble.

The Declaration of Independence: A Close Reading
Informative/Explanatory Essay

After reading the preamble of the Declaration of Independence, write an essay that explains the ideas and principles American colonists used to justify their independence from Great Britain. Support your explanation with specific evidence from the text.

Directions: In the column on the left, identify and describe principles from the Declaration that form the foundation of America’s political beliefs. In the column on the right, cite specific quotations from the text of the Declaration that conveys those principles. You are not limited to one quote per principle. Use this chart as the basis of the essay.

| Principle | Specific Quote(s) from the Declaration |
|-----------|--|
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