Meet the Declaration of Independence
From Edits to Credits
By Ellen Zainea
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Standard: National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA: Era 3 Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s) Standard 1: The causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in forging the revolutionary movement, and the reasons for the American victory

Standard: Michigan Department of Education 3 USHG ERA 3 Revolution and the New Nation (1754 - 1800) Fifth Grade

U3.1 Causes of the American Revolution
Identify the major political, economic, and ideological reasons for the American Revolution.

5 – U3.1.6 Identify the role that key individuals played in leading the colonists to revolution, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, John Adams, and Thomas Paine.

Overview: Students will explore the Declaration of Independence in three separate parts. Through activities which illustrate the parts of the Declaration and a comparison of three versions of the Declaration of Independence on its way to final approval by the Continental Congress, students become familiar with the political, economic and ideological causes of the American Revolution. Primary documents of are used to explore Jefferson’s draft, edits by John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, and finally the version adopted by the Second Continental Congress on July 4 1776.

These lessons have links to language arts standards regarding editing in the writing process. The importance of primary sources is discovered. While explanations can be helpful, when we go beyond primary documents there is always interpretation.
Lesson I  
Introducing the Declaration of Independence  

Materials  
Large poster size display of the song, *Notes on the Declaration of Independence*  
(Appendix A)  

Download: Power Point to introduce the Declaration of Independence:  
[http://www.vcsc.k12.in.us/tcr/liberty/Pd.%204/Declaration%20of%20Independence/Declaration%20of%20Independence.ppt](http://www.vcsc.k12.in.us/tcr/liberty/Pd.%204/Declaration%20of%20Independence/Declaration%20of%20Independence.ppt)  

Worksheet:  Important Facts about the Declaration of Independence  
(Appendix A)  

Answer Key:  Important Facts about the Declaration of Independence  
(Appendix B)  

For each student:  
Important Facts about the Declaration of Independence  

Procedure  

1. Anticipatory Set:  Students are introduced to the Declaration of Independence by the song *Notes on the Declaration of Independence*.  Teacher introduces the song and following this, students sing.  The song should be displayed in the classroom and sung daily as the anticipatory set.  

   Caution:  In slides 3 and 4 the information is not totally accurate.  Slides can be edited before presentation.  Also, slide 11 states the Declaration first appeared in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* on July 6.  However, the Declaration of Independence was published in the *July 3 Pennsylvania Gazette* on page 3 on July 3.
3. Students complete, in think, pair, share format, as much as they recall on Important Facts about The Declaration of Independence

4. In whole class discussion students correct and complete the Facts worksheet.

**Lesson II**  
**Introduction to the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence**

**Materials**

Download:  

Printed material from the following websites to be used during this and following lessons:

- The Declaration of Independence at a Glance:  
- Text and brief background of the Declaration of Independence:  
- Original Declaration of Independence:  
- Dunlap Broadside Declaration of Independence  
- Document Analysis Worksheet:  
For each student:
Printed material from the following websites to be used during this and following lessons:

- The Declaration of Independence at a Glance:  
- Text and brief background of the Declaration of Independence:  
- Original Declaration of Independence:  
- Dunlap Broadside Declaration of Independence  
- Document Analysis Worksheet:  

**Procedure**


2. Declaration of Independence is reviewed using Power Point.

3. Students browse through printed material looking for similarities and differences. Things to be noted: The original and Dunlap broadside versions are the actual documents. Text copies will be used since the original documents are difficult to use. While the text copies are not duplicates, they are still considered primary documents.

4. In small groups the students complete the Document Analysis Worksheets. A spokesman is chosen to report the findings in a whole class activity. Students add to and correct their Document Analysis Worksheet.
Lesson III
Grievances Against the King

Materials

Download:  http://www.nebo.edu/misc/learning_resources/ppt/6-12/revolution2.ppt


Complaint Strips (Appendix D)

For each student:
- Student copy of the Declaration of Independence
- Crown pattern
- One complaint strip randomly assigned
- Student copy of the Declaration of Independence

Procedure

2. Teacher reviews the Declaration of Independence with Power Point.

3. Teacher explains that the second part of the Declaration of Independence is a list of grievances against King George III. More than just the familiar demand of no taxation without representation, the writers present a long list of the reasons the American colonists were angry at the government and monarch. This included the king’s ignoring and altering colonial governments along with mercenaries being hired to force compliance to the king’s rule.

4. Teacher reads from the *Declaration of Independence* the section which lists grievances against the king. Attention is paid to the illustrations because students will be making their own pictures.
Lesson IV
Conclusion of the Declaration of Independence

Materials

Student copy of Declaration of Independence

Definitions of words used in the Declaration of Independence from glossary of *The Declaration of Independence*

or

Download:  [http://www.mcwdn.org/dof/decgloss.html](http://www.mcwdn.org/dof/decgloss.html)

Writing paper

For each student:

- Student copy of Declaration of Independence
- Definitions of words used in the Declaration of Independence from glossary of *The Declaration of Independence*

or

Download:  [http://www.mcwdn.org/dof/decgloss.html](http://www.mcwdn.org/dof/decgloss.html)

Writing paper

Procedure

1. Anticipatory Set: Students practice Notes on the Declaration of Independence

2. Teacher explains the Conclusion of the Declaration makes the case that the colonists have tried to avoid separating from England in the hopes for a peaceful resolution, but with the clear understanding that war is almost inevitable. It notes attempts have been made to peacefully work things out as many of the Americans still felt that England was their brother. They had appealed to more prominent people among the British but their
requests were ignored. Finally, the representatives of the United States of America and the people of the colonies had seen existent conditions that required a change in government structure and policy. The conclusion states 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.”

3. A class list of attempts by the colonists to avoid confrontation is comprised, recorded and displayed.

4. Using the class list, in the voice of a young person in July of 1776, students write a letter to a friend stating 5 attempts the colonists have made to reach a peaceful solution.

5. Students share letters with classmates.

Lesson V
Editing Jefferson’s Draft

Materials

Download segment of editing clip from John Adams television series, Declaration of Independence-Drafting in 1776s:  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1Txi1687wo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1Txi1687wo)


procedure:

2. Teacher reviews the importance of editing written work. The committee members who worked on the Declaration of Independence took their job seriously. An example is found in the pictures.

3. Students study artist conception of the committee of five and Adams, Franklin and Jefferson editing the manuscript. Do these seem realistic? The work of the committee was kept secret so these paintings involve artistic license.

4. Students view the video clip of Adams, Franklin and Jefferson editing the Declaration of Independence. As they watch, the answers to these questions should be kept in mind: What does John Adams say about Jefferson’s work?

Does he propose any specific changes?

Some students of history have said that Franklin’s editing was much like the elder statesman telling young Jefferson, “Tom, cool your jets!”

What changes does Ben Franklin make? What is his reasoning? What is the age difference between Jefferson and Franklin.

4. After viewing the video clip twice, a class discussion is held on the answers to the questions.

5. Students then write written responses to the questions.

6. Using Jefferson’s draft and the version edited by Franklin and Adams, students use the edited version to make the same corrections on Jefferson’s draft.
Lesson VI
Congress Edits

Materials

Jefferson’s Draft edited by John Franklin and John Adams:  
http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/rough.htm#transcription

Final version of Declaration of Independence edited and approved by Congress: 

For each student:  
Jefferson’s Draft edited by John Franklin and John Adams  
Final version of Declaration of Independence edited and approved by Congress

Procedure

1. Anticipatory Set: Students practice Notes on the Declaration of Independence

2. After the edited version from the committee went to Congress, further editing took place. Students will discover this as they compare the Declaration of Independence adopted by Congress with the draft edited by Franklin and Adams. Using Jefferson’s edited draft and the Declaration approved by Congress, students use the edited version making the same corrections on the committee’s document.

Lesson VII
The Declaration in Today’s Language

Materials

Declaration of Independence written in modern English:  

For each student:
Procedure

2. Can we be sure the modern English version of the Declaration of Independence is accurate? Why or why not? (Any time we move away from primary documents our explanations will involve interpretation.) However, using a reputable source to learn and understand history is a good practice.


4. Students write a short essay (minimum five paragraphs) essay summarizing at least five important points they have learned through the study of the Declaration of Independence.

Assessment

Students choose a project from the list of activities to illustrate their knowledge of the Declaration of Independence from the list: http://www.mcwdn.org/dof/doiact.html

Culminating Activity

Students celebrate and share their knowledge and understanding of the Declaration of Independence through a celebration of sharing their projects to classmates, other students and/or parents. When the presentations are completed, students and guests visit the web site: http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_join_the_signers.html to add their signature to The Declaration of Independence. The song Notes on the Declaration of Independence is performed.

Decorations for the event can be found at: http://www.independencedayfun.com/coloring_pages/
Suggested Books for Students


Additional Internet Resources for Teachers and Students

Images of Documents

Brief synopsis of editing of Declaration of Independence
http://www.constitution.org/tj/tj-orddoi.htm

Comparison of three versions of Declaration of Independence: Jefferson Draft, Revised Draft base on notes of John Adams notes on draft edit, final copy as approved by Congress

Library of Congress information regarding drafts of Declaration of Independence
http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/declara/declara3.html

Brief synopsis of life of Ben Franklin
http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/signers/franklin.htm

Franklin’s most important edit of Jefferson’s draft

Papers of Ben Franklin
Letter written by John Adams with his personal account of how/why Thomas Jefferson was chosen by the committee of five to prepare a Declaration of Independence
http://www.eyewitnesshistory.com/pjefferson.htm

Copy of the Declaration of Independence, printed on parchment, is one of 201 produced from William J. Stone's engraving. Students can use this interactive copy to compare spelling conventions of the time with present day spelling.
http://www.history.org/Media/Slideshows/Magnadoodle/declarations/index.cfm

Additional Activities/Information on the Declaration of Independence
http://www.independencedayfun.com/history/
Notes on the Declaration of Independence
By Ellen Zainea

Sung to the tune of Yankee Doodle
Alternating with verse and chorus melodies

For writing we were free from England
Jefferson gets all the glory
But don’t forget the edit played
A big part in the story.

Adams and old Franklin too
Were on the same committee
They made changes that we know
With Tom they made the big three.

They say that Ben made changes to
Sacred and unalienable
He chose self-evident instead
To make the words applicable.

With Ben and John and Thomas too
So many things were redone.
Being precise in what they said
Was work and not at all fun!

When finally things were put in place
Approved by the committee
The document to Congress went
Philadelphia was the city

Lots of changes still took place
Before the Congress was done
But finally on July the 4th
They approved the Declaration!
A Rising People: Ben Franklin and the Americans
June–July 2009
A Landmarks in American History and Culture Workshop

Still today we cherish this Birthday card of our Nation.
So now let’s closely study it
There’s cause for celebration!
Appendix B

Important Facts about The Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence was adopted by _____________________________.

On the date ____________________________.

It declared America’s freedom from __________.

At that time there were ______ colonies.

Representatives from each of the colonies gathered in Philadelphia. A committee of _____ members was given the work of writing the declaration. They were: ________________.

___________________________  ________________________

and______________________.

The declaration was a __________________ against the policies of _
_____________________.

PENNSSTATE
Harrisburg
_________________wrote the original draft of the Declaration.

The draft was edited by committee members and then by the ____________________________.

Although historians differ in the way they make divisions in the Declaration, we will divide the Declaration of Independence into three parts. They are the__________________________,
_________________________and ____________________________.

One of the most important parts of the Declaration of Independence states

“ All ____ are created equal, that they are
___________by their creator with certain _____________.

Among these rights are ____________, ____________ and the
___________________________.”

**These definitions are important to understand:**

Endowed…with______________

Unalienable ____________________________

Pursuit ____________________________

Declaration Detective Activity: What word of the above quotation might be changed if the Declaration were written today?
The Declaration of Independence was adopted by _The Second Continental Congress_.

On the date _July 4, 1776_.

It declared America’s freedom from _England_.

At that time there were _13_ colonies.

Representatives from each of the colonies gathered in Philadelphia. A committee of _5_ members was given the work of writing the declaration. They were: _Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston, John Adams, Roger Sherman and Thomas Jefferson_.

The declaration was a _protest_ against the policies of _King George III_.

---

**A Rising People: Ben Franklin and the Americans**

June–July 2009

_A Landmarks in American History and Culture Workshop_

Appendix C

Important Facts about
The Declaration of Independence
Answer Key
Thomas Jefferson wrote the original draft of the Declaration.

The draft was edited by committee members and then by the Second Continental Congress.

Although historians differ in the way they make divisions in the Declaration, we will divide the Declaration of Independence into three parts. They are the preamble, grievances, and conclusion.

One of the most important parts of the Declaration of Independence states:

“All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights.

Among these rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

These definitions are important to understand:

Endowed…with given

Unalienable that cannot be taken away or removed

Pursuit the action of trying to get or achieve something

Declaration Detective Activity: What word of the above quotation might be changed if the Declaration were written today? People, citizens, etc might be used in place of “men.”
Appendix D
Grievances Against King George III
Complaint Strips

- 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.
A Rising People: Ben Franklin and the Americans
June-July 2009
A Landmarks in American History and Culture Workshop

- 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 harrass 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 themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever

• 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.

• 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.