

# STUDENTS INVESTIGATING PRIMARY SOURCES

## Rhetoric of Revolution

### Celebrate Freedom Week Series: Part III

How does language intensify the message of the Declaration of Independence?

*A Short Activity for High School and Middle School*

#### **Benchmark Correlations**

##### Celebrate Freedom Week Information

**SS.912.C.1.2**-Explain how the Declaration of Independence reflected the political principles of popular sovereignty, social contract, natural rights, and individual rights.

**LAFS.910.RH.2.4**- 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 science.

**LAFS.1112.RH.2.4**-Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

**SS.8.A.3.7**- Examine the structure, content, and consequences of the Declaration of Independence.

**SS.7.C.1.4**- Analyze the ideas (natural rights, role of the government) and complaints set forth in the Declaration of Independence.

**LAFS.68.RH.2.4** - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

**LAFS.68.RH.2.6** – 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).

#### **Activity Documents and Handouts**

- ✓ Projected image of the Dunlap Broadside of the Declaration of Independence
- ✓ Rhetoric of Revolution handout

#### **Full Document Citations**

[Dunlap Broadside \[Declaration of Independence\]](#), July 4, 1776; Rough Journals, 9/5/1774 - 3/2/1789; Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, 1765 - 1821, Record Group 360; National Archives Building, Washington DC. National Archives Identifier: 301682.

[<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/301682>]

[<https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/dunlap-broadside>]

[Engrossed Declaration of Independence](#), August 2, 1776; Miscellaneous Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774 - 1789; Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, 1765 - 1821, Record Group 360; National Archives Building, Washington, DC. National Archives Identifier: 1419123.

[<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1419123>]

[<https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/the-declaration-of-independence>]

#### **Activity Vocabulary**

**barbarous** – inhumane cruelty

**desolation** – total emptiness or destruction

**hero** – a person who is admired for their positive qualities and/or achievements

**oppression** – unfair treatment; the use of authority or power in a cruel or unjust manner

**petition** – a formal written request made to a person in authority, a leader, and/or an elected official

**perfidy** – betrayal

**redress** – correct a wrongdoing

**solemn** – formal and dignified

**tyranny** – a government that abuses its power

**tyrant** – a single ruler that possess and abuses absolute government power

**usurpations** – the act of exercising power by force, taking someone’s power or property by force

**villain** – a person who is involved in crime or cruel behavior



**Orange County Public Schools**

1. Project or write the term “hero” on the board and ask students to brainstorm the words that come to mind when they think of this term.
2. Have students share out and list their ideas on the board.
3. Project or write the term “villain” on the board and repeat Steps 1 and 2.
4. Explain to students that words have power. Word choice can shape your message; the authors of the *Declaration of Independence* understood this and used words to paint a picture of their relationship with the King of Great Britain. Remind students that the Declaration of Independence was written to establish that the colonies were independent from Great Britain. They were making an argument to persuade others to agree with their perspective.
5. Pass out the Rhetoric of Revolution handout.
6. Explain to students that they will evaluate three different sets of passages from the *Declaration of Independence* from the hero and villain standpoint. Point out to students that the excerpts on the left side of the graphic organizer are about the colonists and the excerpts on the right side are about the king. **Teacher Note:** The point of this activity is for students to evaluate how the authors’ of the *Declaration of Independence* strategically chose language to portray themselves and the colonies in one way and the King of Great Britain and Parliament in another way. They outlined their argument as an “us” versus “them” or “good” versus “bad” conflict.
7. Read the directions on the handout aloud and direct student attention to the first set of passages.
8. Read each excerpt aloud and model the process of circling the persuasive, colorful or descriptive language. **Teacher Note:** Use the Sample Answers as a guide.
9. Pose the following questions for discussion: How is the language different between the two excerpts? Does one excerpt use language that sounds heroic and one excerpt sound more villainous?
10. Direct student attention to the second and third set of passages. Instruct students to read the remaining set of excerpts with a partner and work together to circle the colorful/descriptive language and work together to answer the following questions: How is the language different? Does one column use language that sounds heroic and one column sound more villainous? Instruct students to answer the questions on a separate piece of paper.
11. Have student pairs share out.
12. Pose the following question for summary and closure: How does language intensify the message of the Declaration of Independence?

**Enrichment Suggestion** – Assign students the following [RAFT activity](#).

### RAFT

Student Directions: Respond to the following writing prompt. Make sure you know what your role is, who your audience is, what the format you will be writing is, and what your topic is. In your RAFT, you need to persuade the audience. Please base your response off the Declaration of Independence and historical knowledge.

R=Role	A=Audience	F=Format	T=Topic
Reporter on the scene while the Declaration of Independence is read aloud for the first time in Philadelphia, PA	Other Colonists	A news article	Reactions to the reading of the Declaration of Independence.

## RHETORIC OF REVOLUTION

Directions: Read each passage and circle language that is persuasive, colorful or descriptive. On a separate piece of paper answer the following questions:

1. How is the language different between the two excerpts?
2. Does one excerpt use language that sounds heroic and one excerpt sound more villainous?

<b>COLONISTS</b>	<b>KING</b>
<i>“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another...”</i>	<i>“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 &amp; perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.”</i>
<i>“In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms”</i>	<i>“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.”</i>
<i>“We...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”</i>	<i>“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.”</i>

**barbarous** – inhumane cruelty

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## RHETORIC OF REVOLUTION – Sample Answers

Directions: Read each passage and circle language that is persuasive, colorful or descriptive. On a separate piece of paper answer the following questions:

1. How is the language different between the two excerpts?
2. Does one excerpt use language that sounds heroic and one excerpt sound more villainous?

<b>COLONISTS</b>	<b>KING</b>
<p><i>“When in the Course of human events, it becomes <b>necessary</b> for one people to <b>dissolve</b> the political bands which have connected them with another...”</i></p>	<p><i>“He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of <b>death, desolation and tyranny</b>, already begun with circumstances of <b>Cruelty &amp; perfidy</b> scarcely paralleled in the most <b>barbarous</b> ages, and <b>totally unworthy</b> the Head of a civilized nation.”</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The first excerpt is straightforward and the second excerpt is much more descriptive and dramatic.</li> <li>2. The first excerpt makes the colonists sound more heroic because they were acting out of necessity. The second excerpt makes the king sound like a villain.</li> </ol>	
<p><i>“In every stage of these <b>Oppressions</b> We have Petitioned for Redress in the <b>most humble</b> terms”</i></p>	<p><i>“The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of <b>repeated injuries and usurpations</b>, all having in direct object the establishment of an <b>absolute Tyranny</b> over these States.”</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The first excerpt presents the colonists as victims and acting to protect themselves and the second excerpt is much more descriptive and dramatic.</li> <li>2. The first excerpt makes the colonists sound more heroic because they were victims and needed to save themselves. The second excerpt calls the king a tyrant and villain.</li> </ol>	
<p><i>“We...do, in the Name, and by Authority of <b>the good People</b> of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of <b>Right ought to be Free</b> and <b>Independent States</b>”</i></p>	<p><i>“A Prince whose <b>character</b> is thus marked by every act which may define a <b>Tyrant</b>, is <b>unfit</b> to be the ruler of a free people.”</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The first excerpt presents the colonists as good people that need to be free and the second excerpt states that the king is a tyrant.</li> <li>2. The first excerpt makes the colonists sound more heroic because they were victims and needed to save themselves. The second excerpt calls the king a tyrant and unfit to be a ruler.</li> </ol>	