

## THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

**SS.7.CG.1.6** Analyze the ideas and grievances set forth in the Declaration of Independence.

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### 2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES

- Updated from SS.7.C.1.4
  - Changed from “Analyze the ideas (~~natural rights, role of the government~~) and ~~complaints~~ set forth in the Declaration of Independence.” to “Analyze the ideas and grievances set forth in the Declaration of Independence.”
- Depth of Knowledge Changes within Benchmark
  - No changes
- Benchmark Clarification Changes
  - Addition of, “Students will identify the unalienable rights specifically expressed in the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence (e.g., life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness).”
  - Changed from “Students will ~~identify~~ the natural rights ~~specifically expressed in the Declaration of Independence (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness).~~” to, “Students will recognize natural rights, social contract, limited government and the right of resistance to tyrannical government.”
  - Changed from “Students will recognize colonial ~~complaints~~ as identified in the Declaration of Independence (imposing taxes without the consent of the people, suspending trial by jury, limiting judicial powers, quartering soldiers, and dissolving legislatures).” to “Students will recognize colonial grievances as identified in the Declaration of Independence (e.g., imposing taxes without the consent of the people, suspending trial by jury, limiting judicial powers, quartering soldiers and dissolving legislatures).”
- Vocabulary Changes
  - Changed from “complaints” to “grievances”

## Essential Teacher Content Background Information

[Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use]

This section addresses the following topics:

1. Natural Rights and the Declaration of Independence
2. Colonial Grievances Identified in the Declaration of Independence

### 1. Natural Rights and the Declaration of Independence

There are three core themes found in the Declaration of Independence. It is a common misunderstanding that the Declaration of Independence formed a government. This concept is important because the Declaration of Independence focuses instead on what the colonists found to be unacceptable governance. These unacceptable governance practices fell into three broad categories:

Power was concentrated in one place (unitary government). The concentration of power contributed to the abuse of power. The form of government that created this concentration of power was going to be avoided for this reason when the colonists formed their own government.

For example, the Preamble includes the following phrase:

*“...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. — ...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.”*

The Preamble focuses on “natural rights philosophy”, the notion that there are certain rights that are inalienable, or God given. Because these rights are given by God, and not given by a government, any government or person cannot take them away. Natural rights supersede legal rights, those rights granted by governments. Government abused its power by denying the colonists their natural rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Natural rights are those rights that belong to a person simply because they exist. Natural rights are also understood to be inalienable rights because they are God given. Rights given by God may not be taken away by the government.

There is a relationship between natural rights and the role of government. In the same way that government can deny the people their natural rights, so too can government protect natural rights. Governments are created by people, who can create government structures that protect natural rights. The people consent to how they are governed because they wish for a government that will protect their natural rights; if the government fails to protect the peoples’ natural rights, the people have the right to change the government. In extreme cases, the people have the right to abolish the government if their natural rights are not being protected. Once that government is abolished, the people will then create a new government that protects their natural rights. The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence explains the peoples’ natural rights and the role that government plays in guaranteeing those rights.

The preamble is based largely on the ideas of John Locke, a 17<sup>th</sup> century English philosopher whose work *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* includes the notion that government is based on the principle of

“consent of the governed”. Locke argued that legitimate governments function based on the people’s consent. The form of government was less important than the government’s actions; the government earned the people’s consent provided that it protected the people’s “life, liberty and property”.

The preamble states that it was the *form* of government (unitary, or centralized power) that rendered it impossible for the colonists to enjoy their “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness”, which justified their right to “alter or abolish” the government (“...that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it”). Jefferson also makes it known, later in the preamble, that King George III shares the blame for the government failing to insure core guarantees to the people (“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.”). Together, the preamble makes clear that both the form and the head of government have not earned the people’s consent. In many respects, the preamble foreshadows that the first sovereign government that the colonists would form would not be a unitary government, and would exclude King George III.

## 2. Declaration of Independence

The bulk of the *Declaration of Independence* is devoted to enumerating the colonists’ grievances about King George III and his abuse of power. The preamble ends with “let facts be submitted to a candid world”. The phrase indicates that the *Declaration of Independence* was not written *to* King George III, but rather *about* King George III. This explains why every complaint is written in the third person (“he”) and not the second person (“you”).

The listing of grievances may also be understood as a foreshadowing device for the way that the colonists formed their future governments and the way that they articulated fundamental individual rights.

Examples include:

Grievance	Meaning	Later Action	Document
He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.	He has refused to enforce laws	Checks and balances system insures that the chief executive enforces the laws	U.S. Constitution
He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance	He has forbidden the legislature to pass laws	Separation of powers system insures that the legislature has the right to enact laws	U.S. Constitution
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 refused to pass laws that would benefit particular states  He expects that states will forfeit their right of representation	Federal system where the states are represented in the national legislature, and the states have the power to pass laws of particular importance to the people living in those states	Articles of Confederation  U.S. Constitution

<b>Grievance</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Later Action</b>	<b>Document</b>
He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.	He “fired” legislatures if those legislatures did not do what he wanted them to do.	The people elect the national legislature either directly or indirectly, through their state legislatures.	Articles of Confederation U.S. Constitution
He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records	He made it difficult for the colonists to participate in governance	State-centered government where the primary power of government was held at the state level  Federal system where the states are represented in the national legislature and retain their own sovereignty	Articles of Confederation U.S. Constitution
He has obstructed the Administration of Justice by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.	He has forbidden laws to be passed that establish judiciary powers	Separation of powers system insures that the legislature has the right to enact laws	U.S. Constitution
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 denied judges their independence to make decisions based on case facts and the law alone	Separation of powers system insures judicial independence	U.S. Constitution
He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.	He has forced persons to house military personnel	Guarantee that the people will not be forced to house military personnel except in wartime	U.S. Bill of Rights/Third Amendment  “No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.”

<b>Grievance</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Later Action</b>	<b>Document</b>
For imposing taxes on us without our Consent	Taxed citizens without the citizens giving their approval	Creation of a national legislature with the power to tax the people; each state is represented in the national legislature (Congress). Members of Congress are elected by the people either directly, or through the state legislatures (Direct election of Senators created with the 17 <sup>th</sup> amendment in 1913;	U.S. Constitution/Article I, Section 7 (“all bills for raising revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives”) and Article I, Section 8 (“Congress shall have the power to lay and collect taxes”)
For depriving us in many cases, of the benefit of Trial by Jury	Denying those accused of crimes jury trials under circumstances that the colonists deemed appropriate	Guarantee of jury trials	U.S. Bill of Rights/Seventh Amendment  “In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved...”
He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.	Refused to protect the colonists from foreign aggression on colonial lands	Guarantee that the federal government would protect states threatened with violence	U.S. Constitution/ Article IV, Section 4: “The United States shall protect each of them (states) against Invasion; and...against domestic violence.

## Lesson Summary

ESSENTIAL QUESTION		
What are the ideas and grievances in the Declaration of Independence?		
BENCHMARK		
SS.7.CG.1.6 Analyze the ideas and grievances set forth in the Declaration of Independence.		
CIVICS EOC REPORTING CATEGORY		
N/A		
OVERVIEW		
In this lesson, students will analyze how the ideas of natural rights and the role of government and grievances are outlined in the Declaration of Independence.		
BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will identify the unalienable rights specifically expressed in the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence (e.g., life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness).</li> <li>Students will explain the concept of natural rights as expressed in the Declaration of Independence.</li> <li>Students will recognize natural rights, social contract, limited government and the right of resistance to tyrannical government.</li> <li>Students will analyze the relationship between natural rights and the role of government: 1. People are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; 2. Governments are instituted among men to secure these rights; 3. Governments derive their just powers from the consent of governed; and 4. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it and to institute new government.</li> <li>Students will recognize the connection between specific grievances in the Declaration of Independence and natural rights violations.</li> <li>Students will recognize colonial grievances identified in the Declaration of Independence (e.g., imposing taxes without the consent of the people, suspending trial by jury, limiting judicial powers, quartering soldiers and dissolving legislatures).</li> </ul>		
BENCHMARK CONTENT LIMITS		
N/A		
CIVICS CONTENT VOCABULARY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>abolish, assent, consent of the governed, deprive, despotism, dissolve, endowed, grievance, impel, impose, institute, natural rights, oppression, quartering, rectitude, self-evident, tyranny, tyrant, unalienable (inalienable) rights, usurpations</li> </ul>		
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES		
Close reading of complex text	Collaborative learning	Inquiry with primary sources

## **MATERIALS**

- Declaration of Independence Painting (external link)
- Declaration Painting Viewing Guide
- National Archives Artwork Analysis Worksheet (external link; optional)
- Declaration of Independence: Background Information and Brainstorming activity sheet
- Declaration of Independence image (external link)
- Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence reading
- Declaration of Independence: Understanding Vocabulary in Context activity sheet
- Declaration Vocabulary slide
- Primary Source Document Analysis worksheet
- Performance Assessment Guidelines

## **B.E.S.T. STANDARDS**

- ELA.7.R.2.1- Explain how individual text sections and/or features convey a purpose in texts.
- ELA.7.R.3.2- Paraphrase content from grade-level texts.
- ELA.V.1.3- Apply knowledge of context clues, figurative language, word relationships, reference materials, and/or background knowledge to determine the connotative and denotative meaning of words and phrases, appropriate to grade level.
- ELA.K12.EE.1.1- Cite evidence to explain and justify reasoning.

## Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace

DAY	ACTIVITY SEQUENCE
DAY 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To begin this lesson, project the “<a href="#">Declaration of Independence Painting</a>” by John Trumbull.</li> <li>2. Pass out the “Declaration Painting Viewing Guide”.</li> <li>3. Review the viewing guide as a whole class and provide students with time to identify evidence and write answers in complete sentences for each question.  <b>Teacher Note:</b> If your students require additional direction for analyzing this painting, please reference the “<a href="#">National Archives Artwork Analysis Worksheet</a>”.</li> <li>4. Share the following information about the painting with the students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ John Trumbull painted a presentation of the Declaration of Independence in what is now called Independence Hall in Philadelphia.</li> <li>■ The painting features the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence — John Adams, Roger Sherman, Thomas Jefferson (presenting the document), and Benjamin Franklin — standing before John Hancock, the President of the Continental Congress.</li> <li>■ This painting currently hangs in the U.S. Capitol.</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. Ask students to define the term ‘independence’ and pose the following question for discussion: What is an example of independence in everyday life?</li> <li>6. Pass out the “Declaration of Independence: Background Information and Brainstorming” activity sheet.</li> <li>7. Provide students with some background information about the circumstances leading up to and the reasons for writing the Declaration of Independence. Instruct students to take notes on their activity sheet.  <b>Teacher Note:</b> Utilize the Essential Content Background section to guide the discussion. Some key points to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ During the Second Continental Congress in 1775, delegates argued over whether to seek independence or remain loyal to Great Britain. Many did not want to seek independence as they feared that this would start a war with Great Britain. Others felt that independence was necessary because King George III was an oppressor who was limiting the colonists’ rights and actions. They felt that Great Britain was becoming a tyranny.</li> <li>■ In 1776, Thomas Paine stated that it was ‘common sense’ for the colonies to break away from Great Britain. He said that King George was a ‘royal brute’ and the colonies had every right to sever ties.</li> <li>■ After many months of debate, more than half of the delegates agreed to declare independence from Great Britain.</li> <li>■ Thomas Paine’s writings were very influential in the decision to declare independence.</li> <li>■ Thomas Jefferson, the main author, detailed the colonies’ reasons for breaking away with Great Britain.</li> <li>■ The document argued that the king did not look after the interests of the colonies anymore.</li> <li>■ He listed the grievances, or complaints, that the colonists had towards the crown.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>



DAY 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Project the “<a href="#">Declaration of Independence</a>” image from the National Archives website.</li> <li>2. Place students into pairs and have them brainstorm about the document using the questions on their “Declaration of Independence: Background Information and Brainstorming” activity sheet to guide their thinking.</li> <li>3. Have students share out.</li> <li>4. Encourage students to share questions they raised about the document during their paired brainstorm. List these questions on the board.</li> <li>5. Explain to students that they will next analyze excerpts from the document in order to understand the colonists’ argument for independence.</li> <li>6. Project and pass out the “Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence” reading.</li> <li>7. Read the “Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence” aloud to the whole class.</li> <li>8. Instruct students to answer the following questions: What is this about? Who is <i>He</i>? What is the main issue of this document?</li> <li>9. Have students share out.</li> </ol>
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DAY 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pass out the “Declaration of Independence: Understanding Vocabulary in Context” activity sheet and project the “Declaration Vocabulary” slide. <b>Teacher Note:</b> The terms are listed as they appear in the text.</li> <li>2. Read the “Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence” aloud to the class for the second time and pause at each term. Instruct students to define the term using the clues available. <b>Teacher Note:</b> If additional support is needed to define terms in context, utilize the S.L.A.P. technique: 1. SAY the word aloud to the class, 2. instruct students to LOOK for clues, 3. instruct students to ASK themselves what the word might mean and think of another word that may be used to express that meaning, and 4. PUT that word in place of the unknown word, does it make sense? Why or why not?</li> <li>3. Have students mark their text and add the definition for each term on the activity sheet.</li> <li>4. Begin reading the “Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence” aloud to the class for the third time.</li> <li>5. Pause after the first sentence in the second paragraph and pose the following question for discussion: What do you think the statement: <i>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</i> means? Have you heard the phrase life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness before? Do you think this applies to all people? How does the text explain this phrase?</li> <li>6. Lead students to the understanding that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are natural rights. Ask students to define the term natural rights in their own words and write it in the discussion section of the “Declaration of Independence: Understanding Vocabulary in Context” activity sheet.</li> <li>7. Continue reading the second paragraph and pose the following question for discussion: What is the connection between natural rights and the role of government? What evidence from the text led you to this conclusion? Instruct students to take notes on their “Declaration of Independence: Understanding Vocabulary in Context” activity sheet during this discussion.</li> <li>8. Pass out the “Primary Source Document Analysis” worksheet. Explain to students that this worksheet includes some of the questions you, the teacher, created in regards to the document.</li> </ol>
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Compare the list of student-generated questions from the brainstorming activity yesterday with the questions on the worksheet.</li> <li>10. Circle any questions on the board that are not covered by the worksheet.</li> <li>11. Explain to the students that they will continue reading the document with their partner in order to answer the questions on the “Primary Source Document Analysis” worksheet.</li> <li>12. Monitor student progress while the pairs are working.</li> <li>13. Merge sets of pairs together so that students are in groups of four.</li> <li>14. Provide time for the groups of four to review and compare their answers.</li> <li>15. Ask students to share their responses for Question 6F.</li> <li>16. Instruct students to read through the remaining student-generated questions on the board. Ask students if they are able to answer any of the questions using the text.</li> <li>17. Pose the following reflective questions for discussion: How does this information of the Declaration of Independence fit into what else we have learned? How might we find answers to some of the questions still listed on the board?</li> <li>18. Checking for Understanding (Formative Assessment):  <u>Prompt</u>            Using what you have learned from analyzing the Declaration of Independence, write a well-crafted informative text explaining the relationship between natural rights and the role of government and how the colonists’ grievances are related to the concept of natural rights.</li> </ol>
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DAY 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Checking for Understanding (Performance Assessment): Explain to students that they will have an opportunity to demonstrate and share their understanding of the Declaration of Independence in a creative way. Pass out the “Performance Assessment Guidelines” and review the project expectations and grading criteria with the class.</li> <li>2. Provide time for students to complete the task.</li> </ol>
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## Civics Content Vocabulary

Word/Term	Definition
<b>abolish</b>	to end
<b>assent</b>	to agree
<b>consent of the governed</b>	an agreement made by the people to establish a government and abide by its laws
<b>deprive</b>	to take something away
<b>derive</b>	to take
<b>despotism</b>	a system of government where the ruler has unlimited power
<b>dissolve</b>	to bring to an end
<b>endow</b>	to be given something naturally
<b>grievance</b>	a complaint
<b>impel</b>	to urge
<b>impose</b>	to establish by using authority or power
<b>institute</b>	to establish
<b>natural rights</b>	the belief that individuals are born with basic rights that cannot be taken away by governments
<b>oppression</b>	the use of authority or power in a cruel or unjust manner
<b>quarter</b>	to house
<b>rectitude</b>	the quality or state of being correct
<b>self-evident</b>	obvious, having no need of proof
<b>tyranny</b>	a government that abuses its power
<b>tyrant</b>	a single ruler that possesses and abuses absolute government power
<b>unalienable (inalienable) rights</b>	basic rights of the people that may not be taken away
<b>usurpation</b>	the act of exercising power by force

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### [Civics 360 Resources](#)

Florida Department of Education's Civic Literacy Reading List

- *The Rights of the Colonists* by Samuel Adams

## ANSWER KEYS

Sample Answers: Declaration Painting Viewing Guide

Sample Answers: Declaration of Independence: Background Information and Brainstorming activity sheet

Sample Answers: Declaration of Independence: Understanding Vocabulary in Context activity sheet

Sample Answers: Primary Source Document Analysis worksheet

Performance Assessment Guidelines

Written Response: Sample Scoring Rubric

## SOURCES

"[Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776](#)" by John Trumbull is under the Public Domain

"[Declaration of Independence](#)" from the National Archives is under the Public Domain

The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription:

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html)

Primary Source Analysis Worksheet:

[https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/written\\_document\\_analysis\\_worksheet\\_former.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet_former.pdf)

Performance Assessment Rubric: Adapted from: Oral Evaluation Rubric, Based on: Iowa State University, 2005. Oral Presentation Rubric, <http://www.educ.iastate.edu/elps/rubricoral.htm>, Accessed 19 May 2005

<http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/assess/oralpresentations.html>

The SLAP Strategy: <http://literacyblock2010.wikispaces.com/file/view/Vocabulary.pdf>, Accessed April 2013