| *From Subjects to Citizens*  **A Revolution of Words: The 250th Birthday of the Declaration of Independence and Its Impact on the Nation** |
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| **Women: The Declaration’s 72nd Birthday in 1848** |

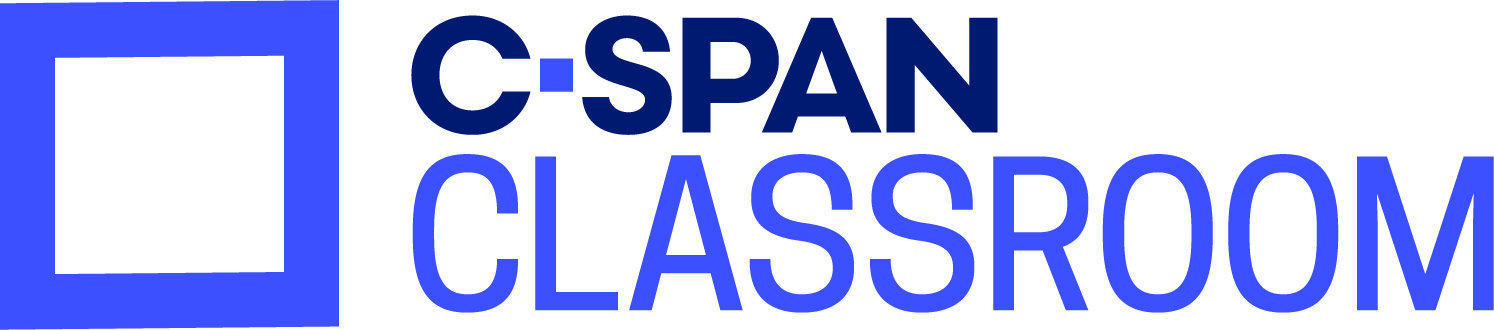
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## **LESSON OVERVIEW**

| **DESCRIPTION** |
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| In this lesson, students will examine the Declaration of Independence in its 72nd year. The focus will be on the promises outlined in the Declaration and their connection to women during the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. |
| **ESSENTIAL QUESTION** |
| How did the promises of the Declaration of Independence serve as an inspiration to women in its 72nd year? |
| **KEY PROMISES** |
| * Equality * Unalienable Rights * Consent of the Governed * Right to Revolution |
| **MATERIALS** |
| * C-SPAN “Abigail Adams” Video (external link) * Primary Source Digital Unwrapping Slides * National Archives Comparing and Contrasting Declarations (external link) * Comparing and Contrasting Declarations Worksheet * C-SPAN “Significance of Women’s History” Video (external link) * Promises of the Declaration Handout (optional) |

## **TEACHER CONTENT BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

*[Not intended for student use]*

**1. Key Promises in the Declaration of Independence**

1. **Equality**

The Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal”. This concept of equality focuses on equality as opportunity, where “all men” are created equal, although being created equal does not guarantee equal experiences. Enlightenment philosophers supported the concept of [individualism](https://centerforindividualism.org/individualism-founding-fathers-part-1-liberty-limited-government/). Individualism suggests that each person possesses an inherent worth that supports freedom, self-reliance, and individual skills, talents, and interests. Equal opportunity in the context of individualism means that being born equal does not lead to equal results or equal outcomes.

1. **Unalienable Rights**

According to the Declaration, unalienable rights (“natural rights”) are those rights with which people are born (given “by their Creator”). They include the unalienable rights of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. These rights cannot be taken away by the government, and the government is also obligated to protect unalienable rights. These rights are associated with 17th to early 19th century European Enlightenment philosophers who supported unalienable rights as the means to challenge traditional authority that existed under monarchies.

1. **Consent of the Governed**

Consent of the governed includes that “governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,” as written in the Declaration. This promise focuses on self-government. The people rule themselves through governments that they establish. Because the people establish those governments and are not ruled by a government imposed on them (such as a monarchy), the people give their consent to how they are governed. Thus, self-rule is experienced when the people establish their own government to which the people give their consent.

1. **Right to Revolution**

The right to revolution recognizes that there may be times when the government abuses its power. The Founders wrote, “[T]hat 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...” This phrase suggests that when the people have determined that the government is not protecting their unalienable rights, they may change (“alter”) or replace (“abolish”) their government. The Declaration of Independence justified the colonists’ decision to separate from the British king. Since then, Americans have exercised their “right to revolution” by altering the government when the government has failed to live up to its promises through elections, interest groups, social movements, and political parties. Some of these changes have included broadening political power (who has it, what form it takes), defining citizenship, how the people experience self-government, and protecting individual rights.

**2. Connecting the Promises to Women**

1. **Equality**

The 1848 Women’s Rights Convention was the first convention held in the United States that called for women’s equality. Among other efforts, convention leaders developed an updated version of the U.S. Declaration of Independence to better reflect women’s need for equality in the areas of politics, government, the economy, religion, and other aspects of society.

Yet, women’s equality has been [slow to emerge](https://theowp.org/reports/accelerating-action-paving-the-path-to-gender-equality/), as there have been those who have argued that equality requires the same government treatment and protections for men and women. Yet there are others who have argued that women and men, because they are not the same, should not be treated equally.

Those who favor equal treatment between men and women often focus on political and economic opportunities. Political opportunities include voting, running for office, and serving on juries, among others. Examples of equal economic opportunities include prohibiting employment discrimination based on sex and paying men and women different wages for doing the same job. These issues have been addressed through legislation and the courts. For example, the 19th Amendment, ratified in 1920, denied governments the power to limit women’s voting rights. Once women had their voting rights protected by the U.S. Constitution, they could vote in any election and run for public office. Second, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Hoyt v. Florida* (1961) that states could not treat women and men differently when identifying whom to select for jury duty. Third, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 denied employers the power to pay women less than men to do the same job, although it was not until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that employers could not discriminate against women in employment. In effect, the Equal Pay Act allowed employment discrimination (denying women access to higher-paying men’s jobs) but not pay discrimination (women and men holding the same job).

Women’s efforts to realize equality have been hard fought. Despite these gains, there are many who argue that barriers to women’s equality continue. [Debate continues](https://www.forbes.com/sites/kellydittmar/2024/08/16/kamala-harris-takes-dnc-stage-in-a-political-landscape-changed-for-women-since-2016/) about the next steps that the government could take to pursue women’s equality.

1. **Unalienable Rights**

Natural rights philosophy focuses on the idea that the government is obligated to protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of property. These rights, because they are unalienable, may not be taken away by the government for any person: by virtue of being born, individuals are guaranteed these rights. Since natural rights philosophy was introduced during the late 17th century, the right to pursue property is now understood as the right to pursue happiness.

The obligation for the government to protect women’s natural rights has met with controversy since the Declaration of Independence was written. This controversy is mainly due to outdated beliefs that women are not entitled to natural rights because of their limited abilities, such as intelligence or skill. Similarly, the concept of coverture (from the French, “covering”), denied natural rights to married women because, once women married, they “belonged” to their husbands (thus the tradition that women change their last names upon marriage). Until women married, women were the property of their fathers. As property, women lacked natural rights—under the law, they were not people. For example, until the Civil Rights Act was enacted in 1964, employers could deny women job opportunities in certain fields because they were female. The Civil Rights Act was amended with Title IX in 1972, denying colleges and universities from discriminating against female students seeking higher education. Title IX also created opportunities for female college students to secure athletic scholarships. These examples demonstrate that it was through civil rights legislation that the government has pursued guarantees of unalienable rights to women.

**3. Brief Timeline of Women’s Rights**

**In 1776**, Abigail Adams urged her husband, John, to “remember the ladies” when establishing a new government.

**In 1848,** the women’s suffrage movement launched in the United States with the Seneca Falls Convention. An estimated 300 women and men attended; among those were Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, & Frederick Douglass. It was during this event that the Declaration of Sentiments was presented and modeled after the Declaration of Independence. 68 women and 32 men signed the Declaration calling for equal treatment of women and men under the law and voting rights for women.

**In 1851**, Sojourner Truth, a formerly-enslaved person turned abolitionist and activist, delivered her famous “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech.

**In 1865**, the American Equal Rights Association was formed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.

**In 1869**, Wyoming passed the first women’s suffrage law allowing women to vote and hold office.

**In 1872,** Victoria Woodhull became the first woman to run for president (Equal Rights Party).

**In 1877**, Senator A.A. Sargeant (R-CA) introduced a Woman Suffrage Amendment to Congress, which Susan B. Anthony helped write.

**In 1913,** suffragists organized a parade in Washington, D.C., called the Woman Suffrage Procession. This march was the first public demonstration in the nation’s capital.

**In 1913**, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns formed the Congressional Union for Women Suffrage, lobbying for a constitutional amendment securing women the right to vote. (In 1916, this was renamed to the Congressional Union of the National Woman’s Party or NWP.)

**In 1916**, Jeannette Rankin (D-MT) was the first woman elected to the House of Representatives.

**In 1916,** President Woodrow Wilson stated that the Democratic Party platform would support women’s suffrage.

**In 1920**, the 19th Amendment was ratified and certified as law, giving women the right to vote. Charlotte Woodward Pierce was the only woman who signed the Declaration of Sentiments in 1848 who lived to see the 19th Amendment ratified. She was 90 years old.

**In 1923,** the Lucretia Mott Equal Rights Amendment was initially proposed.

**In 1963,** President John F. Kennedy signed into law the Equal Pay Act.

**In 1964,** President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act.

**In 1972,** President Richard Nixon signed Title IX of the Education Amendments into law.

**In 1972,** Rep. Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) became the first African American woman to run for president.

**In 1981,** Sandra Day O’Connor was sworn in as the first woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.

**In 1984,** Rep. Geraldine Ferraro (D-NY) became the first female vice presidential candidate of a major party.

**In 2013,** the U.S. military removed a ban against women serving in combat positions.

**In 2021,** Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA) was sworn in as the first female vice president of the United States.

Sources:

American Bar Association, [19th Amendment Centennial: Suffrage Timeline](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/programs/19th-amendment-centennial/toolkit/suffrage-timeline/)

History, [Women’s History Timeline](https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/womens-history-us-timeline)

Civil Rights Act (1964), <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/civil-rights-act>

Equal Pay Act (1963), <https://education.blogs.archives.gov/2017/06/23/equal-pay-for-women/>

Hoyt v. Florida, 368 U.S. 57 (1961), <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/368/57/>

Nineteenth Amendment (1920), <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/woman-suffrage>

Women’s Rights Convention (1848), <https://www.nps.gov/wori/index.htm>

Coverture, <https://www.womenshistory.org/articles/coverture-word-you-probably-dont-know-should>

Title IX of the Civil Rights Act (1972), <https://www.justice.gov/crt/title-ix>, <https://www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2022/nr22-41>

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## **ACTIVITY SEQUENCE**

| **HOOK** | 1. As a whole class, watch the two clips from the [Abigail Adams video](https://www.c-span.org/classroom/document/?24036) from C-SPAN. 2. Ask the students to reflect on Abigail’s opinion of the promises offered by the Declaration of Independence. How would her views have been perceived in 1776?   **Teacher Note:** You can display the [Promises of the Declaration Handout](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vfiBfxrGwyMKDr63vU3nUqrnEIbrMcws/view?usp=drive_link) as a reminder of those promises. |
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| **FEATURED PRIMARY SOURCE UNWRAPPING** | 1. Explain to students that it is time to ‘unwrap’ this month’s primary source document.   **Teacher Note:** As the theme of these lesson plans is America’s birthday, each month, you and your students will digitally unwrap a new primary source. This is an opportunity to drum up excitement as we lead up to the 250th celebration and draw our focus to a time when individuals were fighting for those promises outlined. Because March is Women’s History Month, the focus for this month will be on women.   1. Use the [Primary Source Digital Unwrapping Slides](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ggDOrpeO1ooft1cRckSGOaH5fYl5-tTPiviTl4yFXgw/edit?usp=sharing) and reveal the primary source inside. 2. Examine the document together and ask students if anyone can identify it.   **Teacher Note:** This month’s source is The Declaration of Sentiments from the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention. Use the link provided in the Speaker Notes of the slide to go directly to the source on the National Archives website, where you can find examination tools like a magnifier and a typed transcription.   1. Ask the students if this primary source reminds them of another one they have seen. (Declaration of Independence) 2. Explain that in 1848, women met at the Seneca Falls Convention. During this convention, they presented their Declaration of Sentiments to hundreds of attendees. Their Declaration was modeled after the Declaration of Independence. |
| **LESSON ACTIVITY** | 1. Pull up the [Comparing and Contrasting Declarations](https://docsteach.org/activities/student/comparing-and-contrasting-declarations) from the National Archives so students can manipulate and read both documents easily. 2. Pass out the [Comparing and Contrasting Declarations Worksheet](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VjARGxrbfHbJu9ra6T_p8ucswgIDeLxA6cukWUq3JBk/edit?usp=sharing). 3. Have students work in pairs or groups to answer the questions from the worksheet. 4. Go over the last question on the worksheet as a class. Ask students how the promises compare between the two documents: *Why do you think these women modeled their document after the Declaration of Independence?* 5. Next, inform students that they're going to watch a [C-SPAN video](https://www.c-span.org/classroom/document/?24034) about the significance of Women’s History Month. 6. Come back together as a class and discuss some of the ways the women’s suffrage movement paved the way for related modern activism. Emphasize that their continued work to uphold the promises of the Declaration of Independence is as relevant today as it was in 1776 or 1848. |
| **CONCLUSION** | 1. Based on their analysis of the Declaration of Sentiments, have students create a slogan that would encourage others to join women in their pursuit of achieving the promises of the Declaration of Independence. |

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## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SAMPLE ANSWERS**

| **SAMPLE ANSWERS** |
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| * [Comparing and Contrasting Declarations Worksheet](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1q8OKJRazw2afYJVRdbPvCalBT4hqsWppk7VDUvvFbko/edit?usp=drive_link) |

| **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES** |
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| [C-SPAN Classroom Featured Resources for Women’s History](https://sites.google.com/view/c-spanclassroom-featured/u-s-and-state-history/u-s-history#h.p_TijFQfZU0Chw)  [Lou Frey Institute Educator Resources](http://floridacitizen.org)  [National Archives Document Analysis Educator Resources](https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets) |