| *From Subjects to Citizens*  **A Revolution of Words: The 250th Birthday of the Declaration of Independence and Its Impact on the Nation** |
| --- |
| **Americans Today: The Declaration’s 250th Birthday in 2026** |

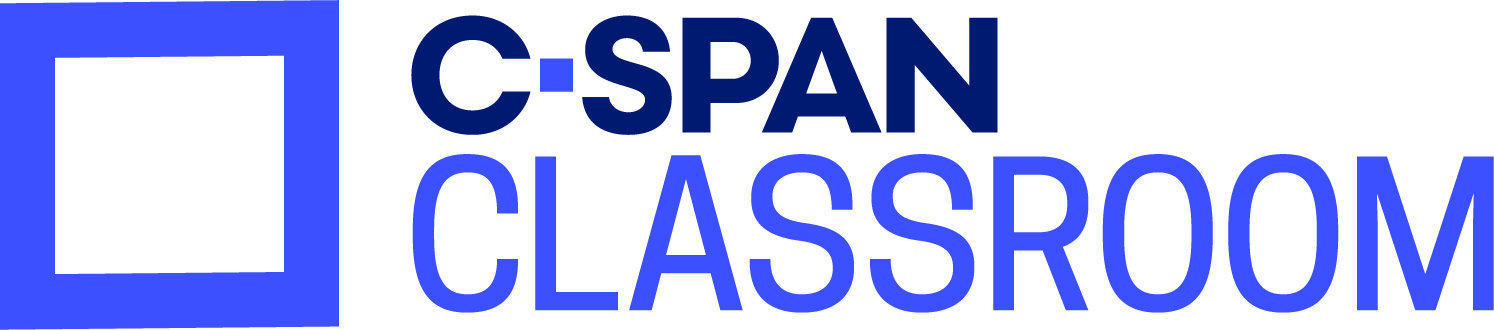
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

[**LESSON OVERVIEW 2**](#_me2xii9yn4s4)

[**TEACHER CONTENT BACKGROUND INFORMATION 3**](#_yu6k8v6r0k)

[**ACTIVITY SEQUENCE 5**](#_8235yrbrt9kd)

[**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SAMPLE ANSWERS 7**](#_6zbbqov7ccs2)



## **LESSON OVERVIEW**

| **DESCRIPTION** |
| --- |
| In this lesson, students will examine the Declaration of Independence in its 250th year. The focus will be on the promises outlined in the Declaration and their connection to Americans today. |
| **ESSENTIAL QUESTION** |
| How do the promises of the Declaration of Independence serve as an inspiration to Americans in its 250th year? |
| **KEY PROMISES** |
| * Equality * Unalienable Rights * Consent of the Governed * Right to Revolution |
| **MATERIALS** |
| * Promises of the Declaration of Independence Handout * Franklin and Lincoln Slides * Primary Source Digital Unwrapping Slides * Presidential Quotes * Presidential Quote Analysis Worksheet |

## **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.

Source:

Terri Susan Fine, Ph.D., Associate Director Emerita, Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government

## **ACTIVITY SEQUENCE**

| **HOOK** | 1. Start today by opening the [Promises of the Declaration of Independence Handout](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1r994AZr9A4VG-C59AvkPdWY7NlEbXhYr/view?usp=drive_link) and reviewing the four promises covered in previous lessons. 2. Pull up the [Franklin and Lincoln Slides](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1YqoeXlkEHtDDEKB-Nn4JV2BiccnftOCRJyNBfUcDv9o/edit?usp=sharing) and display slide 1 to the class. 3. As a class, read the story about an interaction Benjamin Franklin had after the Constitutional Convention. 4. Ask the students what Benjamin Franklin meant by his response. |
| --- | --- |
| **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 a time to celebrate the Declaration of Independence’s 250th birthday and focus on those promises outlined.   1. Use the [Primary Source Digital Unwrapping Slides](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1rskFqh9WXYdxnojZOe4u0eAGzqCRjvGFT1onEzHUexg/edit?usp=sharing) and reveal the primary source inside. 2. Watch the video together by clicking on the link in the second slide.   **Teacher Note:** This month’s source is the retirement speech made by Supreme Court Justice Breyer in 2022.   1. Ask students to reflect on the “experiment” Justice Breyer is referring to. *What part do young people today play in the future of our constitutional republic? What happens to our “experiment” if future generations become cynical and don’t value it?* |
| **LESSON ACTIVITY** | 1. Explain to students that today, we’re going to take some time to reflect on some words of wisdom stated by former presidents by analyzing some [Presidential Quotes](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1imsG2_BU-QG47EpEhNEnnFImgSFK8bqP9oSGZYfVf4M/edit?usp=sharing).   **Teacher Note:** Make enough copies/duplicates of the Presidential Quotes so every student has one quote.   1. Pass out the [Presidential Quote Analysis Worksheet](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ggoqyECA5_OAZwAQna-cBLNRPcOh8wwgsNTaWCLyheU/edit?usp=sharing) and one quote to each student. 2. Each student will analyze their quote and answer the questions on their analysis worksheet. 3. When individual analysis is complete, have students share some of their quotes and reflections using a pedagogical strategy of your choosing. |
| **CONCLUSION** | 1. Pull up the [Franklin and Lincoln Slides](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1YqoeXlkEHtDDEKB-Nn4JV2BiccnftOCRJyNBfUcDv9o/edit?usp=sharing) and display slide 2. 2. As a class, summarize Lincoln’s words on the Declaration. 3. Have students choose one of the groups mentioned over the previous eight lessons. Using what they learned regarding that group’s story, have them explain how their experiences embodied Lincoln’s advice. |

## 

## 

## 

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SAMPLE ANSWERS**

| **SAMPLE ANSWERS** |
| --- |
| * N/A |

| **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES** |
| --- |
| [C-SPAN Classroom Government and Civics Featured Resources](https://sites.google.com/view/c-spanclassroom-featured/u-s-government-and-civics)  [Lou Frey Institute Educator Resources](http://floridacitizen.org)  [National Archives Document Analysis Educator Resources](https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets) |